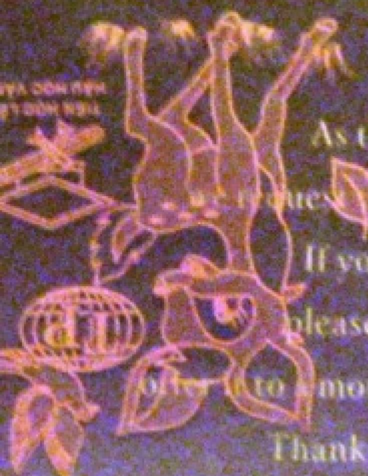


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EN294 THE CONCEPT OF EMPTINESS IN PĀLI LITERATURE VEN. MEDAWACHCHIYE DHAMMAJOTHI THERO



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THE CONCEPT OF EMPTINESS IN PĀLI LITERATURE

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Preface

The aim of this book is to examine the relation between the concept of Suñña in early Buddhism and Śūnyatā in Madhyamaka. In doing this the present researcher has attempted to prove the point that Śūnyatā as presented by Nāgārjuna is not an attempt to reject the early Buddhist teachings but is an attempt to firmly assert and establish that the Buddha's true teaching is founded on Śūnyatā of all phenomena.

The present researcher has also attempted to establish the point that Nāgarjuna's criticism is not aimed at early Buddhism but at Substantialists and Essentialists doctrines put forward by later Buddhist schools, specially the Sarvāstivādins who came up with the Svabhāva concept. This is mainly a literary study, specially focused on the Pāli Tipiṭaka, and the *Visuddhimagga*. The methodology adopted is mainly historical. Hence an attempt was made to trace the historical development of the Śūnyatā concept from early Buddhism to

Madhyamaka. The present researcher has been able to show that the shift of emphasis from Anatta to Śūnya is due to the historical circumstances in which the two doctrines rose to prominence.

I am highly grateful to Mr. Sanath Nanayakkara, the former Deputy Editor of the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* who read this book and advised me in many ways. I also thank the Most Ven: Dr. Bodagama Candima thero, the Chief Sanghanayaka of Taiwan who agreed to publish this book. Finally, my thanks go to every body who helped me in numerous way to complete this research successfully.

Ven: Dr. M. Dhammajothi Thero.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

THE USE OF THE TERM SUÑÑA AND OTHER RELATED TERMS IN PĀLI LITERATURE

1.1.

In Pāli Suttas

What we call Buddhism is the teaching of a great religious teacher who lived in North-east India, around the 6th Century B.C.(1) By this time India was a behave of religious activities. There were many religions and philosophers prevalent. The" Brahmajāla Sutta" of the Dīghanikāya says that there were a such teachings. The Suttanip ā ta, in a number of suttas such as" Kalahāvivāda"," Cūlavyuha","Mahāvyuha" describes how numerous religious teachers proclaimed many different truths, and engage in fierce verbal debates with each other. The" Kālāmasutta" of the Aṅguttaranikāya explains clearly how the people got confused by these teachings put forward by different religious teachers who boldly declared that ' what I say is true and all the rest is false'(Idameva saccaṃ moghamaññaṃ).

All these religious teachers were trying to understand the reality, the nature of the being and the world the lives in. All these religious teachers seems to have commonly held that existence or samsara is full of problems, and therefore it is necessary to find a way out of this problems. Though almost all religious teachers of the time agreed on this point. The reason on which they came to such a conclusions differed from teacher to teacher, from teaching to teaching.

The traditions that put forward this view of samsaric existence and the solution for it, have been broadly divided into two as Sramaṇa and Brāhmaṇa.(2)

What is remarkable is that though both these traditions had many differences, they agreed on one point, that is that there is something , either physical or metaphysical that persist either for long or for a limited period without undergoing any change. Thus the Brhmanic school put forward the view of either an external God, or a Brahman, that is permanent and beyond destruction. Both these are metaphysical concepts. The Sramaṇa as, even the staunch materialists among them such as Ajita admitted something, some essence a material essence that exists, though it cease to be with the destruction of the body at death.

It was such a world view that was commonly prevalent at the time of rise of Buddhism. What is remarkable in Buddhism is that it did not subscribe to either of these traditions. The Buddha, as seen from various biographical sketches of his scattered in early suttas, it is clear, was thoroughly knowledgeable about these religious teachings. After analyzing these teachings he rejected them, This was possible because unlike many other teachers of the time he did not consider either(religious)traditions(Anussava)(4), Logic and reasoning(Takka-vīmaṃsa) as absolute criteria of knowledge . Instead the Buddha adopted personal realization obtained through higher forms of knowledge (Sayaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā) as the most reliable method of understanding the true phenomena, including man and his world of experience.(5)

It is this approach that makes Buddhism a kind of empiricism(6) in terms of modern philosophy. Thus, it is clear that the Buddha broke away from the accepted tradition of the time. The accepted tradition about reality was inclined towards one of the extremes. The Buddha very clearly states this in the "Kaccāyānagotta Sutta" of the *Saṃyuttanikāya*.(7) This Sutta makes the Buddha 's world view very clear and hence, important to understand the main theme of our essay, which primarily is the basis of the Buddha's world view.

In this Sutta the Buddha states that this world is generally inclined to adopt one of the extremes i.e. that everything is (Atthi) or everything is not (Natthi). These are(8) eternalism and annihilation. The Buddha says that he without resorting to either of these two extremes preached, by the middle **(Ubho ante anupagamma tathāgato majjhena dhammaṃdeseti).**

1.1.1 Majjhena dhammaṃ

This "**Majjhena dhammaṃ**"(9) a term, which is of much significance to our study, denotes the principle mode of teaching adopted by the Buddha in explaining reality. This is identified in the same sutta as the Paṭiccasamuppāda (Dependent origination). It is through dependent origination that the Buddha attempted to explain what reality is. This is not his theory, but this the nature, the natural system that operated in the whole observable world.

1.1.2. Paṭiccasamuppāda

This approach of the Buddha was totally different from the opproaches adopted by other teachers of the time. Dependent origination presupposes the view that there is nothing independent of other things. Every thing is dependent on other things. Every thing exists in relation to other things. Therefore, there is nothing permanent, nothing everlasting, nothing that does not get destroyed. This was totally a new world view, the opposite of the one held by the eternalist. They accepted an independent, eternal primary cause. The Buddha rejected such a view as being purely metaphysical. It is on this basis that the Buddha started presenting his world view . The thrust of this world view is to show that every thing is devoid of anything that is permanent like a soul, a self or a substance or an entity.

1.1.3. Anatta

Anatta is the most commonly used term to express this view that everything is without a permanent soul or self.(10) Besides this , the word Suñña itself has been used by this Buddha in his early discourses. This is a very significant fact, for many scholars have attempted to show that the Buddha did not use this word, and that it was an innovation of the Madhyamaka philosophy.

1.1.4. Suñña

Early scholars who studied madhyamaka philosophy and the presentation of Śūnyatā concept by Ācārya Nāgārjuna appear to have been rather shocked and stunned by it. It was totally a new revelation

for them. Being taken by surprise these scholars boldly declared Śūnyatā to be a totally new concept, not heard of in the Buddha's teaching found in the Pāli Sutta's. One such early scholar was Theodore Stcherbatsky. He in his *Central Conception of Buddhism* , said:(11) " **_.... that the whole edifice of early Buddhism was determined and smashed_** ", by this new doctrines of Śūnyatā put forward by Ācārya Nāgārjuna. More bold was the statement made by T.R.V. Murti in his *Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (12). He said;

> **_" Madhyamaka philosophy claimed our attention as the system which created a revolution in Buddhism and through that in this whole range of Indian philosophy. The entire Buddhist thought turned on the śūnyatā doctrine of the Madhyamaka," He further said; "considering the role and the importance of the Madhyamaka, I have ventured to appraise it as the central philosophy of Buddhism "._**

He was wonder-struck by this doctrine as it was presented by Ācārya Nāgārjuna he declared; " **_The Copernican revolution in Indian philosophy was brought about by the Madhyamaka"._** (Murti, p 123). By saying that that this doctrine of Śūnyatā brought about the 'Copernican revolution' Murti was indirectly saying that the whole of early Buddhism was turned upside down. It is with the Copernicus' theory that the planets, including the earth moved round the sun that the whole of old astronomical science took a new turn. Murti's declaration, therefore, suggest that the whole of early Buddhism has to be discarded because of Śūnyatā theory, which Murti assumes to be unknown to be early Buddhism. In fact many others followed Murti and said that Madhyamaka with its Śūnyatā doctrine is totally a new innovation which debunks the early Buddhist teaching .

However, since recently many have written refuting Stherbatsky's and Murti's claims. But few are aware of the fact that as early as 1956 itself a scholar has been criticized these view. It was W.S. Karunaratne who criticized these views in his doctoral thesis entitled ***The Theory of Causality***.(13) In this work he points out clearly that the views of both Stherbatsky and Murti are wrong. Regarding Stherbatsky's statement he says;

" Stherbatsky's statement that the term Śūnyatā is an innovation of the Mahāyāna is remarkable for the ignorance it betrays of the facts of early Buddhism. The literal and philosophical senses of this terms are already clearly attested in Pāli texts. These texts have all the evidence to indicate to use clearly the stages in the evolution of the meaning the term from its original literal sense to the later highly developed philosophical sense. The original meaning of Suñña (skt.Śūnya) is not philosophic and has the sense of "empty", "uninhabited", "useless" ....Because Suñña means empty and void it is frequently used in the sense of 'devoid of'(this or that quality or character)"(14).

He points out that from these sense gradually developed its philosophic meaning, and that this philosophic use of the term Suñña is clearly found in the early suttas themselves. This the "Mahāvedallasutta"(15) in the process of describing this deliverance of the mind through nothingness (Suññata) says that such deliverance could be attained by bhikkus gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to empty hut and reflect thus; This is void of a self or of what belongs to a self (Suññaṃ idaṃ attena vā attanīyna vā' ti).

According to W.S. Karunaratne the specific philosophic sense of the term Suñña has its beginnings here. Here this term Suñña is

used in its literal adjectival sense of "devoid" of any substance or anything substantial thing like the soul or self (atta). Later the term Suñña by itself was used , without the use of "Atta" and "Attanīyena" to bring out this meaning of non-substantiality. Thus in suttas one find the term Suñña used alone by itself to mean non-substantiality.

One good example of this developed philosophic meaning is found in the *Saṃyutta* (1v, 54) this Sutta called "**Suññoloko**" deals with the emptiness of the world. It is presented as a discussion between the Buddha and Venerable Ānanda; The Sutta is as follows;

"Thus this Venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed one .... and said to him; 'Venerable Sir, it is said; 'empty is the world , empty is the world' In what way Venerable Sir is it said; empty is the world?" (Suññoloko suññoloko'ti bhante vuccati. Kittāvatānuko bhante suññoloko' ti vuccati ?).

"It is Ānanda, because it is empty of self and of what belongs to self that it is said; 'empty is the world'.(Yasmāca Ānanda Suññaṃ attena vā attanīyena vā tasmā suññoloko' ti vuccati).

This is further explained in the sutta as follows;

"The eye; Ānanda, is empty of self, and of what belongs to self. Forms are empty of self and what belong to self., Eye consciousness is empty of self and what belongs to self.... Whatever feelings arises with mind-contact as condition-whether pleasant or painful, or neither painful nor-pleasant (Sukha-Dukkha- Adukkhamasukha) that, too, is empty of self or what belongs to self".

" It is Ānanda, because it is empty of self and of what belongs to self that it is said; 'empty is the world,"

This usage of Suñña is very clearly philosophic in meaning and brings out the most earliest feature of the early Buddhist world-view

that there is nothing independent, discrete, self-existent, uncaused or permanent. This is totally opposite of what the most powerful of the philosophical schools of the time held. That is of the Upanisadic thought that posited and uncaused metaphysical cause named by them as 'Brahman'.

A still more clear usage of the term Suñña in this profound philosophical meaning is found in the "Mogharājamānavapucchā" occurring in the *Suttanipāta*.(16) In this sutta which is presented as a dialogues between person called Mogharāja and Buddha, the former posers the question to the latter. " .... ***Him that looks the world in which manner, does the king of death not see ?".*** **(Kathaṃ lokaṃ avekkhantaṃ muccurājā na passati)** In other words it is a question as to what should be the world view of a person in order to escape this samsaric existence which is a continuous process of birth and death. So it is a question regarding how to realize Nibbāna which is beyond birth and death. In answering this profound question the Buddha says;

> ***" Mogharāja, being ever mindful, look upon the world as void having rooted out, the dogmatic view of the self –thus one would cross over death; him that looks upon the world in this manner, does the king of death not see." (Suññato lokaṃ avekkhassu Moghrājā sadā sato attānudiṭṭhiṃ ūhacca, evaṃ maccutaro siyā, evaṃ lokaṃ avekkhantaṃ maccurājā na passati)***

In this the Buddha by using the word Suñña shows what the Buddhist world-view should be in order to escape samsaric Dukkha. This is a purposeful use of the word Suñña to convey the idea that there is no substance in anything that is in the world. The whole world is devoid of any kind of an entity. That it is these substantialist or the essentialist views that make one get involved in all problems(Dukkha)

of life. Hence, in order to get over this situation one should adopt the correct, enlightened view about reality, that the world (here the world is every thing oneself and the one's world of experience) is empty (Suñña). In further clarifying this the Buddha say that one should give up the dogmatic view

(Diṭṭhi) of a self (Atta). Is this not enough proof to show that Śūnyatā of the Madhyamaka school is not an innovation and that it is wrong to hold that is not found in early Buddhism?. Does not this suggest that the scholars who tried to show that the Śūnyatā doctrine totally revolutionized this early Buddhist teaching are definitely wrong?, Why did the scholars jumped to the conclusion and that it is not found in early Buddhism?.

1.1.5. Anicca, Dukkha Anatta

Perhaps this may be due to the fact that in suttas what is emphasized with regard to the nature (Yathābhūtaṃ) of the whole phenomenal world is that it is marked by three characteristics. 1 Anicca, 2. Dukkha 3. Anatta It is these charateristics of what is compounded (sankhata) that is commonly spoken of these suttas. Due to greater emphasis on these, the significance of the word Suñña got lost. Just consider even these three words; Anicca, Dukkha, Anatta. What do they signify? Though they are three different words they are attempting to describe the same reality, the true nature of all phenomena.

1.1.6. Loka

Pāli Anicca or Sanskrit Anitya is the antonym of Nicca (Nitya) meaning permanent. An examination of the word Anicca, as it is used in the Suttas of the Tipiṭaka, clearly shows that it is used in the very same sense of Suñña- meaning devoid of any permanency. According to this early suttas the world is so called, that is it is called the Loka because it is subject to disintegration (Lujjatīti loko). Thus, disintegration, breaking up, dismantling is a feature of Anicca. The *Saṃyuttanikāya*(17) makes this very clear;

> ***" Then a certain Bhikkhu approached the Blessed one ..... and said to him; ' Venerable sir, it is said , 'the world, the world'. In what way venerable sir, is it said, 'the world'? " "It is disintegrating, therefore it is called world.(Lujjati' ti loko bhikku tasmā loko'ti uccati) And what is disintegrating ? The eye (Cakkhu) Bhikkhus is disintegrating, forms (Rūpa) are disintegrating, eye-consciousness is disintegrating, eye-contact is disintegrating, and whatever feelings arises with eye-contact as condition... that too is disintegrating...."***

Thus, this disintegration is also a feature of impermanency, a sign of change, and therefore, it means the absence of anything that is permanent, that the world is devoid of any permanent substances. The description of what the world is itself echoes the idea of Suñña. Thus in the *Samyuttanikāya*(18) it is said;

> ***" What friend is that in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world ? The eye is that in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world. The ear ....the nose ...the tongue ...the body...the mind is that in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world. That is the world by which one is perceiver or the world, a conceiver of the world- that is called the world in the Noble One's Discipline".***

This description of the world brings out clearly that the world is 'Suñña' of anything that is not changing. It is a result of perception through the senses, a conception through the mind and, hence, empty (Suñña) of any permanent , unchanging substances. The two other characteristics namely, Dukkha and Anatta too, are found on this primary nature of impermanence (Aniccata). It is said what is Anicca is Dukkha (**Yadaniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ**), and what Dukkha, that is without a self **(Yadaniccaṃ tadanattā).** The purpose of developing a world-view based on Suñña is to make the followers truly understand the nature of the world and realized that it is 'empty' of any permanency we attach to it. Hence, in this sense it is useless, for it is in the true sense 'devoid' (Suñña) of the value, the usefulness we attach to it.

There are many other instance in the early suttas themselves. That clearly shows that the Buddha was very much using the term Suñña wherever it was appropriate. For example, the sutta on Dhammadinna(19) is a good instance illustrating this fact. This sutta tell how an one occasion when the Buddha was at the Dear Park at Isipatana, a lay follower called Dhammadinna together with five-hundreds others approached him and said to him: ***" let the Exalted one, advice and instruct us in a way that may lead to our welfare and happiness for a long time".*** To this Buddha replied:

" Dhammadinna, you should train yourselves thus; from time to time we will enter and dwell upon those discovers spoken by the Tathagata that are deep (Gambhīra) deep in meaning (Gambhīrattha) supra mundane (Lokottara) <u>dealing with emptiness</u>

(Suññatāpaṭisaṃyutta). It is in such a way that you should train yourself."

1.1.6. Gambhīra and Gambhīrattha

This is very significant because the suttas dealing with Suññata (emptiness) is described as deep(Gambhīra) with deep meaning (Gambhīrattha) and also supra mundane (Lokottara). This suggests that while Anatta is more a term of convenience, more in common usage than Suñña, though meaning the same thing, which is more philosophically and epistemologically profound. Thus, it is good evidence to show that the early suttas have used this term in its deepest philosophical meaning. But it appears from the rest of the Sutta that such profound teachings were somewhat beyond the grasp of the average person. That also may be one of the reasons for the Buddha to opt to use this the term Anatta, instead of Suñña. Suñña by itself literary meant empty, void . This kind of voidness (Suññata) was more difficult to be comprehended than the term Anatta.

As it was shown earlier atta, meaning soul/self, was a term familiar with the people. Therefore, its opposite was fairly easily comprehensible, and the listeners did not find it either very deep or dealing with anything supramundane (Lokuttara). This may be one of the reasons for the Buddha to use it more often in his discourses than the term Suñña. This sutta in question shows that Dhammadinna was not very appreciate of this advice of the Buddha .He said;

> ***"Venerable sir, it is not easy for us – dwelling in a home crowded with children , enjoying Kasian sandalwood , wearing garlands, scents and unguents, receiving gold and silver—from time to time to enter and dwell upon discourses spoken by the tathāgata that are deep, deep in meaning, supramundane ,dealing with emptiness. As we are established in the five training rules(Sikkhāpada), let the Blessed one teach us the Dhamma further".***

It is doubtful whether this would have been the attitude of Dhammadinna and others had the Buddha talk about Anatta, though it meant the same thing. Teaching regarding Suñña was considered extremely deep and incomprehensible. What Dhammadinna and others ultimately do is to agree to follow lesser teaching. The Buddha after listening to Dhammadinna said; ***Therefore, Dhammadinna you should train yourselves thus ; ' we should posses full confidence in the Buddha, In the Dhamma,... in the Saṅgha. We will posses the virtues dear to the noble one's (Ariya), unbroken... leading to concentration."***

1.1.7.Cetovimutti

In the "Godatta Sutta" of the same *Nikāya*(S. 1v,296 f.) the Buddha explained a method of mind development called liberation of mind by emptiness(Suññatācetovimitti). This is explained as; *" Here a Bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut reflects thus; Empty is this of self or of what belongs to self (Suññamidaṃ attena vā attanīyena vā' ti). This is called the liberation of mind by emptiness"* It is seen that this expression Suññatācetovimutti is used to refer to a kind of concentration based on sight (Vipassanā) into the selfless nature of all phenomena. It was said before that the term "Animitta" meaning "signless" also convey a meaning similar to Suñña.

1.1.8. Animitta cetovimutti

This same Sutta refers to another, Animitta-cetovimutti- the signless liberation of the mind. This is also attained by perceiving absence of "sign"(Nimitta) of permanence(Nicca), happiness (Sukha) and self (Atta) which in other words mean the perception of everything as being completely void (Suñña) of anything substantial. In another Sutta in the same *Nikāya* (S.11. 266 f) there is reference to the Buddha preaching dhamma related to Suññata.(emptiness). This is also important to understand how difficult the listeners considered this doctrine. This sutta which was also preached at Sāvatthi starts with a short parable ; It says; 'once in the past the Dasarahas (Khattiya clan) had a kettle drum called the Sumner（Anaka）. When this drum got damaged the Dasarahas inserted another peg. Eventually it so happened that the drum's original drum-head got disappeared and only a collection of pegs remained. The Sutta says;

> ***" So, too, the same thing will happens with the Bhikkhus in the future. When those discoursers spoken by this Tathagata that are deep, deep in meaning, super mundane, dealing with emptiness, are being recited, they will not be eager to listen to them, nor lend an ear to them, nor apply their minds to understand them, and they will not think those teachings should be studied and mastered. But when those discourses that are mere poetry composed by poets, beautiful in words and phrases, created by outsiders, spoken by disciples (Srāvaka bhāsita) are being recited , they will be eager to listen to them, will lend and ear to them, will apply their minds to understand them; and they will think those teachings should be studied and mastered. In this way The Tathāgata that are deep, deep in meaning, supra mundane dealing with emptiness (Suññatāpaṭisaṃyuttaṃ) will disappear."***

Therefore, the Buddha encourage the monks to concentrate and give more attention to the deep teaching on Śūnyatā. This very well shows how concerned the Buddha was about his teaching on Suññata. He knew that as it was difficult to be grasped and understood his followers whould incline towards simpler teachings. In spite of the Buddha's encouragement to make his listeners understand the importance of the concept of Suñña of everything., a majority of them seem to have failed to grasp it. So, the Buddha prefers to use the alternative term "Anatta". This is one of the reasons for the preference of the use of the term 'Anatta' in early Suttas, instead of the term Suñña.

1.2. In Pāli Commentaries

The situation did change later, and even Pāli Buddhism had to adopt Suñña more frequently in its explanation of the true nature of things. By the time of Post canonical and commentarial literature the use of the term Suñña comes into more prominence. Thus the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*(20) uses the term Suñña in almost twenty-five different contexts. This is found in a commentarial discussion of the sutta from the *Suṃyuttanikāya*(1v, 54) quoted before. In commentary of this *Paṭisambhidāmagga* gives twenty-five different modes of Suñña concept. These are presented in the section called "Suññatā Kathā" occurring in the "Yuganaddhavagga ". These twenty-five modes are;

1.2.1. Twenty five fold

1.Suñña-Suñña, 2. Saṅkhāra-Suñña, 3.Vipariṇāma-Suñña.4.Agga-Suñña, 5.Lakkhaṇa-Suñña,6.Vikkhambane Suñña, 7. Tadaṅga-Suñña, 8. Sumuccheda-Suñña, 9. Paṭipassaddhi-Suñña, 10. Nissaraṇa-Suñña, 11. Ajjattā-Suñña, 12. Bahiddhā-Suñña, 13. Dubhato-Suñña, 14. Sabhāga-Suñña, 15. Visabhāga-Suñña, 16. Esanā-Suñña, 17. Pariggaha-Suñña, 18. Paṭilābha-Suñña, 19. Paṭivedha-Suñña, 20. Ekatta-Suñña, 21. Anatta-Suñña, 22. Khanti-Suñña, 23. Adiṭṭhāna-Suñña, 24. Pariyogahāna-Suñña, 25. Paramattha-Suñña.

This shows how developed the Suñña concept of Buddhism was by this time undoubtedly these developments are due to the influence of the development of Buddhist thought in other Buddhist schools like Sarvāstivāda and also Sautrāntika. Prof; W.S, Karunaratne in his already mentioned doctorial thesis (p179) makes the following observation. " *If this list is compared with what is given in Mahāyāna texts it will be found that most of the items in the latter are already found in The Theravāda texts.*" Thus , he points out that here there is not only a correspondence in ideas but even a clear correspondence in terminology. If we consider this statement as correct then we have to conclude that the Suñña concept was quite developed in Pāli Buddhism before it found reference in Mahāyāna and Madhyamaka texts. Thus the same professor observes that ;

> ***"This list also tells us something more to confirm our view that Theravāda teaching on Suññata is considerably well developed and that the Śūnyatā of madhyamaka does not , therefore, represent a development that is altogether new in the history of Buddhist thought".***

It was shown earlier that in the early Suttas the term Suñña or Suññata was used to refer the non-substantiality of things. This in other words means that 'things' are devoid of the value we hold as very valuable and clear to us. In fact, the Buddha used many other terms to convey this meaning. The Buddha is admonishing the disciples to correct their view regarding the nature of things and that they should be viewed as follows; **"Pañcakkhandha aniccato, dukkhato, rogato, gandato, sallato, aghato, ābhadato, parato, palokato. Suññato anattato yonisomanasikātabbo "** This means that all things should be reflected on as impermanent (Anicca), non-satisfactory （Dukkha）, as a disease (Roga), as a boil (ganda), as an arrow （Salla）, as hurtful (Āghata), as an defect (Ābadha), as not belonging oneself（Para）as subject to breaking up （Aloka）,as empty (Suñña)and without a self(Anatta).

Though none of these terms are etymologically connected with the word Suñña, the meaning conveyed is similar. Just as the term Suñña means that a thing is empty of any substantiality, and therefore, devoid of any essence, these descriptive terms also convey a similar idea. When the early Pāli suttas used the word Suñña to bring out the absence of any soul or anything connected with a soul, the meaning suggested is that it is just empty and, hence, of no real value which we mistakenly believe it has.

In commentarial literature there is frequent occurrence of the term Suñña in its highly developed philosophical meaning. This is due to the fact that by this time this term had acquired great significance

in Buddhist philosophical thought, even superseding the word Anatta. This is seen by the importance it had gained in the *Visuddhimagga*.(21). This classical work of Venerable Buddhaghosa explains how Suñña could be viewed from different perspectives. What is significant is that in all these views ethical interest is foremost. Thus, the *Visuddhimagga* explains Suññata as a universal doctrine, applicable to everything in the universe. Then it uses the concept of Suññata in a twofold way to show that everything is devoid of any kind of substance (Atta) or anything substantial.

1.2.2. Four fold

Besides, the *Visuddhimagga* presents other perspectives of Suññata. It says(p 654) that Suññata is fourfold when it refers to the following perspectives; ' not seeing substance in oneself **(Nevakattaci atthānaṃ passati)**, not seeing substance in another person or thing **(Na ca kvacaṃ? Parassa ca attānaṃ kvaci passāti)**, not transferring one's self to another (**Na parassa kiñcanabhāve upanetabbaṃ passāti)**, and not bringing in another self in to oneself (**Na parassa attānaṃ attano kiñcanabhāve upanetabbaṃ passāti).**

1.2.3. Six fold

It is explained that Suññata is six fold when it is applied to each of the six sense organs, six corresponding to objects and six consciousness when they are viewed from the following six ways as being void of substance (Atta),anything substance (Attanīya), permanent (Nicca) firm(Dhuva), eternal (Sassata) and not free from

understanding change (Aviparināma dhamma).

1.2.4. Eight fold

It is eightfold when considered as; non-essential （**Asāraṃ nissāram, sārāpagataṃ nicca-saraṇaṃ**）, essentially unstable (Dhuvasārasāraṃ), essentially sorrowful (Sukhasārasāraṃ), essentially non-substantial (Attasārasāraṃ), essentially impermanent(Suññaṃ, niccena), essentially non-eternal (Suññaṃ sassatena), and subject to change (Vipariṇāma dhammaṃ).

1.2.4. Ten fold

It is tenfold when viewed according to the perspectives of being; empty (Ritta), useless (Tucca) , void (Suñña), non-substantial (Anatta), having no over lord (Anissarīya), as incapable of being free (Akāmakāri), incapable of being had (Alabhanīya), as being alien (Para) as being secluded (Vivitta).

1.2.5. Twelve fold

Similarly Suñña can be understood in 12 different modes when one takes, for a example , Rūpa as being no being' (Satta), no animal (Jīvo), no human (Naro), no youth (Mānva) no woman （Itthi） no man (puriso) no self (Atta) nothing connected with self (Attanīya), no I （Ahaṃ）, not mine (Mama) not another's (Aññassa) not any body's(Kassaci).

1.2.6. Forty fold

It gives a long list of forty ways how Suñña of things could be seen . So all things could be seen as impermanent (Anicca), non-

satisfactory (Dukkha), deceased (Roga), a boil (Ganda) evil (Salla), painful (Agha), ailing (Ābādha) alien (Para), decaying (Palika), distressing (Ita), oppressing (Upaddava), fearful (Bhaya) harassing (Upasagga), unsteady (Cala), breaking (Pabhaṅga), unstable (Addhuva), unprotected (Atara), unsheltered (Alena), helpless (Asaraṇa), refuge-less (Asaraṇabhūta) devoid (Tuccha) empty (Ritta) unpleasant (Anassāda), disadvantages (Ādīnava) changing (Vipariṇāma dhamma), essence-less (Asāraka), originating in pair (Aghamula), tocturing (Vadhaka). Annihilating (Vibhava),defiled (Sāsava),compounded (Saṅkhata), frustrating (Māramisa), tending to be born (Jātidhamma), to decay (Jarādhamma), to grief sorrow and lamentation **(Soka-parideva-Dukkha-domanassa-upāyaāsa dhamma)**, and escape (Nissaraṇa).

It is said that when anything or any of the aggregates (Khandha) are viewed in this manner, it amounts to viewing everything as void . This is the advice given by the Buddha to Mogharāja in the *Suttanipāta.* The use of numerous words to bring out differents shades of meaning of the term Suñña is very clear from this. Thus Buddhism did not consider Suñña to mean a kind of annihilationistic concept, which means "nothing". It could be better rendered as "no+thing". This is the highest philosophical sense connoted by the terms Śūnya / Śūnyatā, as used by Ācārya Nāgārjuna. In Pāli Buddhism every attempt has been made to bring out this important philosophical meaning of the term.

May be that is doing so Pāli Buddhism has been influenced by Sanskrit Buddhism, specially Madhyamaka teachings of Nāgārjuna. This does not mean that the explanation of Śūnya in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is same the one found in the *Visuddhimagga.* While the Madhyamaka explanation clearly lays emphasis on Dharmanairātmyatā, absence of any essence or Sva-bhāva in all dharmas, that is constituent factors of existence, the Pāli explanation following the long cherished tradition of denying "Atta" emphasizes the Anatta or the Pudgalanairātmya.

The above very clearly establishes the fact that Śūnya concept is not an innovation of Ācārya Nāgarjuna , it was quite well known to early Buddhism, though to historical and other reasons, it was Anatta that gained more popularity in usage in Pāli Buddhism.

End- notes

(1). The exact date of the Buddha is now a much debated question. Modern scholarship argues that the Buddha lived around the 5th century B.C. There is a difference between the methods of counting the date adopted by the Southern (Theravāda)and Northern (Mahāyāna schools). For discussions see *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (=EB), vol, v, p122, Buddhist Era (Chinese tradition).

(2). These traditions may be of same antiquity. The Śramaṇa traditions consisted of many divergent teachings put forwards by such teachers as the famous six teachers (e g, Ajita, Makkhali.. etc). Buddhism also fell in to Śramaṇa group. All these were grouped together as they opposed Brahmaṇa teachings. The Brahmaṇa teaching consisted of two different strands; Vedic Brahmaṇism believing in a Creator-God) and sacrifice, and Upanisadic Brāhmaṇism admitting the Brahman-ātman undifferentiated unity.

(3). See such suttas as "Ariyapariyesana", "Mahāsaccaka", (both occurring in the *Majjhimanikāya)* that clearly show that the Buddha not only studied these tradition but even followed them to test their veracity.

(4). The term Anussava is here taken to mean all kinds of traditions, including Vedic textual tradition, that were accepted as assured means of obtaining knowledge. These are referred to in the "Kālāmasutta". (**Mā anussavena, Mā paramparāya, Mā samano no garu)etc.**

(5). The "Saṅgāravasutta" of the *Majjhimanikāya* clearly say that the Buddha himself identified him as an experientialist teacher.

(6). Empiricism, though generally used to mean that kind of teaching based on normal sensory data, it has to be understood, that in this instance when used to describe Buddhism, it includes also views based on extra-sensory-perception which in Buddhist texts is referred to as Abhiññā-literally meaning super cognition. These are six in number, and are said to be the result of culturing the mind through meditation and attaining Jhāna.

(7)). Saṃyuttanikāya(-S) 11, 17.(if not otherwise stated all references to Pāli suttas are to the Pāli Text Society (PTS) of London, edition and their respective translations.

(8). In Pāli Texts these are referred to as Sassatavāda and Ucchedavāda, respectively. The former is attributed to the Upanisadic thinkers and the latter to the Śramaṇas who were mostly materialists.

(9). This would be dealt with in detail at the relevant place quoting the sutta in full.

(10). The significance of this term and its relation to Suñña would be dealt with in the next chapter.

(11). Theodore Stherbatsky , *Central Conception of Buddhism*, Leningrad, 1927, p 46.

(12). T.R.V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1955, preface 1x.

(13). W.S. Karunaratne, *The Theory of Causality*, Published by Indumathie Karunaratne, Sri Lanka, First Edition, 1988. This is the doctoral thesis presented to the London University, SOAS in 1956. This was the same year in which Murti published his work. As this remained unprinted till 1988, it did not receive the notice of scholars.

(14). W.S. Karunaratne, ibid, p 170.

(15). Majjhimanikāya (=M) 1,p 297.

(16). Suttanipāta, "Pārāyanavagga", stanza 1116 .

(17). See *Saṃyuttanikāya,* 1v, 52, "Loka Sutta".

(18). S. 1v, 95.

(19). S. v, 407 ..

(20). This particular stanza should be read with the other two stanzas (no. 277.278). The three stanzas are about the three characteristics (Tilakkhaṇa) of phenomena. The other two stanzas are also important for the fact that 'Anatta' is applied not only to compounded things(Saṅkhata dhamma or saṅkhāra s) but even to the Asaṅkhata (the uncompounded) states like Nibbāna . These two stanza read as;

277. Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā' ti

Yadā paññāya passati

278. Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā' ti

Yadā paññāya passati

(21). *.Visuddhimagga*(PTS) II, 654 . <u>*Path of Purification,*</u> p 762 .

CHAPTER 2

ANATTA AND SUÑÑA

2.1. Pre-Buddhist view of Ātman

Among the numerous motives that influence beings- specially human beings- the urge to servise is one of the strongest. At the beginning this was manifest as the desire to continue living in this existence. But soon this turned out to be a strong urge, perhaps the most strong psychological motivation to continue to live indefinitely. This is clearly seen when one examines the development of eschatological thoughts-that is ideas regarding beliefs pertaining to death, life- after death – of human beings. A universal feature in these thoughts is the intense desire shown by man to continue existing, to go on living even after death. This is a desire for some kind of immortality. Yet as death is an inevitable reality an inevitable event that all had to face. This desire to continue to live was directed to finding out the possibility of continuing to live after death. The earliest wishes related to this among the Indians is faintly reflected in the Rigveda, the earliest document dealing with Indian thought and life. There are no clear references ,but , of course there are hints which show that they were speculating on such beings.

From these hints it is seen that the early Āryans were somewhat mystified, perplexed by death , though it is an event of very common occurrence. To them, death seems to be a fall into a deep dark abyss, from which they had no way out. As such they not only abhorred but

intensely dreaded death. Hence their sole wish was to avoid , to escape death and survive. This is evident from numerous occurrences in the Rigveda which express a fervent desire and yearnling for long-life (Dirghāyutva)(1). To them the numeral hundred (Sata) seems to have connoted a long time, and hence, they expressed the desire to live for hundred autumns (Saradaḥ śataṃ)(2) which means one hundred years.

This desire to postpone death for a long time did not satisfy the Rig-Vedic Āryans, and soon they began to wish for immortality (Amratatva). With the development ethical and moral ideas the eschatological views also gradually further developed. It came to be accepted that this is not the only existence and that beings who dies are not completely annihilated. It was held that there is some kind of next life and that it depends on the moral behavior of a person. The belief in the god called Varuṇa the god who is the most ethical one in the Vedic pantheon of gods and who is considered as the Guardian of nature (Ṛtasya-gopa) was closely connected to these developments.

In later Vedic literature , for example, in the *Atharvaveda* (3), it is mentioned that when a being dies he passes into his next world with the whole body and limbs infact (Sarva tanuh saṅgah) not only that , it is said he continues to enjoy the same kinds of pleasure that he used to enjoy in this world. They believed that the first virtuous man who died become the "Yama" the god of death and that he is immortal and those who are virtuous and fortunate enough to reach the world of Yama (Yama-loka) get the opportunity of obtaining immortality. (Amṛtatva).

The path to this immortality was called Deva-yāna, the way of gods'. The virtuous who led very ethical lives followed the way of gods' and obtained immortality. The belief was that the beings born in this heavenly world of Yama , continued to exist for ever.

2.1.1. Rebirth.

Parallel to this there developed another belief, that is rebirth again in the world of human beings. (Mānuṣa-loka). This is an important development in Indian eschatological believes. While Devayāna led to immortality it came to be accepted that there was another 'path' leading to rebirth in the human world. This was called Pitṛ-yāna (path of Pitṛs or departed ones) (4) The life in the Preta world was not considered eternal . Those who qualified to follow the Pitṛyāna could remain in the world of Pretas only as long as their provisions, that is in this case merit , lasted. Once the merit get exhausted they had to return here(5). This perhaps is the earliest hints about "rebirth" in the human world and hence, the conception of Saṃsāra the cycle of birth and death, continues existence of a being in some form, in some destiny, in some sphere of existence, the number of which vary from religion to religion.

As it is well known the Buddhist texts mention five (Pañca) or six (Cha) destinies (Gati) and thirty one plains of existence . It is seen that in early Vedic texts , besides the Devaloka and Pitṛloka there is also mention of Apāya or Niraya meaning a bad , miserable destiny, birth in hell. Very elaborate and graphic descriptions of the

misery one has to suffer in hell is found in *Bhrāhmaṇas*, *Purāṇas* and Epics. What is significant here are the concepts of Saṃsāra and rebirth . It is these two ideas that led the foundation for the belief in the existence of a things, a substance which subsequently came to be called the " Ātman" in the Upanisads. As a belief in a continous existence of a being came to be accepted , it became necessary to explain what happens after death. Death is a common and real event. Every one was subject to death. The question arose as to what happens to a being after death ? How does he continue to exist if he is subject to death, which marks the end of life . The early Vedic belief is attaining immorality in the world of Yama was capable of offering a satisfactory answer to this.

Even the *Atharvavedic* attempt to explain rebirth as passing from the human world to the next world along with the whole body and limbs (Sarva-tanuḥ saṅgah) did not appear acceptable , as the body and the limbs of a dead person obviously remained in this world . If so how could the body and the limbs pass on to the next world?. These were perplex question that forced thinkers of the time to find answers . The Āraṇyaka period shows how these thinkers resorted to forest-living and devoted their time to speculate on these problems. They felt that there is some thing more subtle, that is passing from one life to another, thus maintaining unbroken continuity of the being, though interrupted by death, which marks the end of one life-span, in the long process of continuous existence –Saṃsāra.

These deep ponderings by thinkers finally reached the climax in the Upanisadic period leading a new doctrine of monism. This is a

doctrine opposed to pluralism which admits plurality or duality, such as between body and mind, or the God and his creation, the world. Monism accepts the existence of one supreme being or a universal principle which really is the only source, the matrix of everything else. The Upanisadic thinkers labeled this as Bhrahman- a neuter principle, a metaphysical concept. This they identified as the prime source , not the creator but the matrix, the womb from which originates every other thing,

2.1.2. Ātman

In order to explain the origin of things that result from this principle, they came up with another metaphysical concept the ' Ātman' . It is this Bhrahman-Ātman doctrine that lay as the foundation of Upanisadic philosophy. These two concepts are considered as the two pillars on which rests nearly the whole edifice of Indian philosophy(6).Bhrahman is explained as the universal soul (Jagad-ātma, Viśva-ātma),the macrocosm. It counter part , the macrocosm, is described as the individual soul (Pudgala-ātma). As the Pudgala-ātma is dependent and based on Jagad-ātma, the former ,too, is metaphysical. Being above matter , it is not coming within the sphere of the six sense faculties. Being non-mater, it is not subject to change , mutation or destruction. It is permanent , everlasting non-destructicable , and continuing to exist forever. This individual soul (Pudgala-ātma) was considered some-thing having the specific qualities of firmness or stability (Dhruva), permanency (Nitya), eternality (Sāsvata), indestructible (Avināśi) etc.

Thus the upanisadic thinkers identified this as the subtle principle , the non-physical substance that lies in all- in all beings- transmigrates from life to life . It remains infact , unharmed at death, for it is separate from the body (Aññaṃ Jīvaṃ aññaṃ sarīraṃ). Being non-physical it does not get affected at the time of the destruction of the body at death. When a being dies , the body remains and the Ātman leaves the old body and enters into a new one. Thus continues the process of existence. This Ātman is not different from Bhrahman, for the former is merely the microcosm and the latter the microcosm. Both are metaphysical and hence, both described in the same way. In the *Bhrahadāraṇyaka- upanisad,* one of the most famous Upanisadic philosophers explaining this says:

" This is imperishable which the wise people adore- not gross, not subtle, not short, not long, without shadow, without darkness, without air, without space, without attachment , without taste, without smell, without sight, without ears, without speech, without mind, without light, without breath, without mouth, without either inside or out side. It does not eat anything nor can anything eat it "(7).

Both these namely, Bhrahman and Ātman mythical are methophisical concepts. They are non-affable, as they are beyond description (Anirvacanīya) . The most common way of describing these was by using negative epithets a system of description called via negative. Thus the Upanisadic philosophers posited a highly metaphysical concept as the essence of their philosophical thought. They traced everything to the Ātman which subsequently led to Bhrahman-which are not two distinct principles but one and the same. They pointed out that true freedom from the problem of samsaric

existence could be attained only by intuitively realizing the undifferentiated unity between Bhrahman and Ātman.

This fact is the crux of the Upanisadic thought what is interesting to note here is that it was not only the upanisadic thinkers that posited the belief in 'something' like a soul. However there is a difference between the concept of this 'substance' or the soul that underlies all beings. According to the Upanisadic belief it is different from body (Aññaṃ Jīvaṃ aññaṃ sarīraṃ) and hence, metaphysical. The Jains of the Sramaṇa group came up with a similar concept in presenting their concept of Jīva- the counter part of the Ātman concept of upanisads. In developed Jainism too this Jīva was conceived as being different from the body. It was explained that though different from the body, the Jīva is capable of expansion and contraction according to the dimensions of the physical body. Thus , though it was no form, it is co-extensive with the body.(8)

Another of the Six Famous Teachers of the Sramaṇa tradition namely, Pakuda kaccāyana presented according to the "Samaññaphala Sutta" (9) of the *Dīghanikāya* , a doctrine of seven categories (Satta-kāya-vāda). These are; the four elements –earth ,water, fire, air, (Paṭhavi, Āpo, Tejo, Vāyo) happiness(Sukha) sorrow (Pain) and Jīva (the life source) These are described as immutable categories.

Others generally identified the soul or the subtle principle that underlies beings as being material and hence, identical with the body (Taṃ jīvaṃ taṃ sarīraṃ) . For them there is a soul, which is made of matter and identical with the body and getting annihilated (Uccheda) at the dissolution of the body. They believed that this principle of life

underline being continue to exist as long as the body exists and get annihilated at death, and hence, no continuity thereafter. This Sramaṇa materialistic teaching is called Ucchedavāda (annihilationism) as against the Sassatavāda (eternalism) of the Upaṇisad tradition that posited a everlasting , immutable soul (Ātman).

From this it is clear that almost all important schools of religious thought of 6th century B.C. India accepted the concept of some kind of a soul whether it be eternal or non-eternal. Among all these philosophical traditions, it was the Upanisdic tradition that was most influential at the time. Vedic monotheism , with its rites, rituals and sacrificial practices were popular among the masses and these were utilized to obtain secular benefits. For emancipatory purposes ,for salvation from the miseries of continuous existence the truth seekers, the elite followed the Upanisadic doctrine founded on Bhrahman-ātman unity. The belief in a soul , a substance ,some permanent entity underlying man had by then become very deep rooted. This was the most authentic and revered philosophical teaching at the time of the rise of Buddhism . This is very well reflected in the discourses of the Buddha .

2.2. Buddhist view of Anatta

2.2.1. Anatta

The famous very first-discourse preached to the five ascetics at The Deer Park in Isipatana namely, the "Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta" very clearly bear evidence to this . The Buddha begins the

discourse by admonishing the Pañcavaggiyas- the group of five , by asking them to avoid two extreme practices namely, indulgence in sensual pleasure , (Kāmasukhallikānuyoga) the path put forward by the materialist thinkers (Ucchedavādings) who generally accepted a soul that is identical with the body and hence, non-metaphysical) and self- tormentation (Attakilamathānuyoga) the path advocated by the Eternalist (that is Upanisadic thinkers who presented the belief in a soul that is different from the body and hence, metaphysical). The latter teachers posited the practice of severe ascetic practice as the only effective way of freeing the soul that is in bondage to the body. The Jains represented a mixture of these two extreme views.

The Buddha's analyzing of all phenomena made him view the prevailing understanding of the nature of reality as being ill-founded. He saw everything in a new perspective, different from the traditional way of understanding the nature of things. Hence, he obtained vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge and light with regard to things unheard of before. (Pubbe ananusstesu dhammesu)(10). This was a new visions obtained through empirical means and not through and kind of mystical experience or speculation.

He saw that there is no entity, either permanent or impermanent , underline phenomena, which remains without undergoing change. His vision of phenomena made him convinced that all phenomena in devoid of any such entity that could be called a soul, a substantial , something that continues to be without undergoing change. He saw everything as a process, as being in a flux, as dynamic forces in movement. To him reality is not static , permanent entity, thing that

continues to be without being subject to change. He was convinced that the belief in a soul or a self or some such entity is extremely misleading and, hence, leading the followers on the wrong path to more misery. So, he was faced with the task of dispelling this wrong belief in a soul which was deeply imbedded in the minds of the people of the time.

The Buddha was convinced of the fact that to set the followers on the right path to emancipation it is very necessary to make them give up this belief in a soul (Sakkāya-diṭṭhi). This belief he explained as a root course of our bondage to Saṃsāra for it gives rise to utter selfishness which forms a great obstacle to liberation.

" It is for this purpose that he came ups with his new teaching on Anatta-no-soul. Buddha's Anatta doctrine has to be understood in this background. He is not discarding the ātma doctrine and in its place supplanting the Anatta view. His Anatta doctrine should not be misunderstood as another view, because from the very out set the Buddha discarded the practice of clinging to views. The terms Anatta is used to counter the Atta (=Ātma) concept. Ātma concept denoted the existence of a permanent entity. Anatta totally rejected this . That is the specific use of the 'Anatta' concept and, hence, it should not be taken as another speculative view which posits a 'no-soul' concept. Anatta doctrine is only a means to overcome belief in the 'atta'.

Anatta, stated in very simple terms is merely a denial of Atta (=Ātma). It is a statement describing the true nature of things. It is not the result of speculation engaged in by the Buddha , for the Buddha never indulged in speculation. It is the realization he obtained through the objective analysis of the empirical self and the world of existence. Through this analysis, done with the help of higher knowledge

(Abhiññā) , he clearly understood that all phenomena, the individual and the world of experience is constituted of certain constituent elements and none of them can be considered as permanent and therefore , cannot also be considered as one's self.

2.2.2. Pañcakkhandha

Most of the early sermons are for in purpose of dispelling this wrong belief in the existence of an Ātman. Thus, after preaching his introductory sermon the "Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta" which gives the broad parameters of the teachings of the Buddha, and convincing the Pañcavaggiyas (five ascetic monks) about the fruitfulness of following the path he presents, the Buddha preached to them about the falsity of the belief in Ātman. This is the "Anattalakkhana Sutta", found recorded in the "Mahāvagga" of the *Vinayapiṭaka*.(11). If we accept the tradition which says that this is the second of the suttas preached by the Buddha as correct, then this Sutta reveals two important facts. One is that this is the first time that Buddha presented Pañcakkhanda (five aggregates) analysis of phenomena, which analysis serves as the most fundamental analysis of phenomena in Buddhism. The other is that the proper grasping and inter realization of the fact that all things are conpounded by five aggregates and all things are completely devoid of an Ātman, as claimed by other religious teachers, gives the liberating knowledge.

This shows how important this teaching about the absence of an ātman is in the teaching of the Buddha, and how important its understanding is for the eradication of Dukkha (suffering). In this sutta

the Buddha takes up the empiric individuality and analysis it into five aggregates namely Rūpa (form) Vedanā (feeling or sensitive) Saññā (perception) Saṅkhāra (mental formation) and consciousness ((Viññāṇa). The Buddha using a very simple form of practical logic say: " *Monks, this form is no-self, if form happened to be the self , this form would not be subject to illness. Had it been so it would have been possible to command , may my form be in this, may it not be otherwise and so on. But as the form is no-self , therefore, there is no way to get form to behave in the way one wants may it be like this ; may it not be like this .*"

The same is repeated with regard to the other four aggregates namely, Vedanā, Saññā , Saṅkhāra and Viññāṇa. Then the Buddha raises the question whether any of these aggregates are permanent (Nicca) . The Pañcavaggiāyas (five ascetic monks) answer saying they are impermanent (Aniccaṃ). Then the Buddha asked them whether anything that is impermanent is non satisfactory (Dukkhaṃ) or satisfactory (Sukhaṃ). In chorus they answer that they are non-satisfactory (Dukkham).

It is then that the Buddha puts to them the more specific question, whether what is impermanent non-satisfactory and subject to change could be considered thus: 'this is mine', 'this I am', 'this is my self'. The Pañcavaggiyas (five ascetic monks) say , it is not possible it is not possible to consider so.

From this the Buddha extends his discussion to things outside the individual, to aggregates related to past present and future, internal and external, gross and subtle, low and high, really and far-away and

posses the same question whether one could consider any of them as 'This is in mine' 'This I am' and 'This is myself'. The Pañcavaggiya gives the same reply.(12) This is explained as "seeing things with perfect wisdom (Sammappaññāya), in their true nature (Yathābhūtaṃ)'. This vision brings about emancipation, for it leads to detachment (Virāga) and release (Vimutti). Pañcakkhanda (five aggregates) analysis of the individual is not the only analysis presented in the early suttas to bring out the true nature of phenomena, specially to demonstrate the absence of any thing that could be labeled the individual soul, the Ātman or Pudgala-ātma. There four other such analysis. These are ;

1. Nāma-Rūpa analysis- the analysis of the individual into name and form or mind and matter.
2. Six elements (Dhātu) analysis. That is the analysis of the individual into four primary elements namely, earth (Paṭhavi), water (Āpo), heat (Tejo), and wind (Vāyo), space (Ākāsa) and consciousness (Viññāṇa).
3. Twelve bases or Āyatanas. That is six sense organs and six sense subjects.
4. Eighteen elements. This is constituted of the six sense faculties and the six sense objects consciousness arising depending on the contact between the objects. For example- eye-consciousness (Cakkhu-viññāṇa) ear-consciousness (Sota-viññāṇa) etc. These along with the analysis into five aggregates constitute the five types of analyses. Though these analyses are done for different

purposes , one of the main objectives of these analyses is to bring into focus that there is no soul, a self in the individual.

This shows that how fundamental this no- soul teaching (the Anatta doctrine) to Buddhism is. Perhaps, Buddhism is the only teaching that categorically denies the existence of such an entity. However, this denial does not amount to a sort nihilism. As shown earlier, the Buddha's admonition is to steer clear of the two extremes of eternalism (Sassatavāda) and annihilationism (Ucchedavāda). This is very clearly pointed out in the "Kaccayānagotta Sutta" of the *Saṃyuttanikāya*. In this sutta preached by the Buddha to the elder Mahākaccāna. He says that the two world is generally inclined accept one of the two extreme views that is "there is" (Atthitā) and "there is not " (Natthitā), which in other words mean eternalism and annihilaionism respectively. Then the Buddha clearly declares that , ' the Buddhas without resorting to either of these extrems preached by the middle' (Ubho ante anupagamma tathāgatho majjhena dhammaṃ deseti).

It is important to note that the doctrine preached avoiding the two extremes that is the extremes of etenalism the teaching which posits the existence of an eternal self and the extreme doctrine of annihilationism, that is the doctrine which posts a soul or a self that get completely annihilated at death , is called the doctrine preached by the middle **Majjhena dhammaṃ deseti** . This in other words, is another way of expressing the Buddha 's Anatta doctrine . Thus, Anatta doctrine is a **via media** , a middle teaching which avoids both

eternaism and annihilationism. In the "kaccāyanagotta Sutta" itself the Buddha identifies this 'doctrine preached by the middle' with his doctrine of dependent origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda=Skt, Pratītyasamuppāda). He clarifying this point says that those who hold that everything is eternal will give up that view when they see the perishing of things. Similarly those who hold that everything get annihilated at death will give up that view when they see the rising of things. Thus the Buddha's doctrine by the middle (Majjhena dhamma) is about rising (Uppāda) and falling (Vaya) of things . It is another name for change (Aniccatā) for dependent arising of things.

The doctrine of Anatta too is the same. It helps to steer away from accepting an eternal soul as well as a soul that gets annihilated at death. Instead, it makes one see reality as an unbroken, continuous process, an ongoing process of dyanamic forces which generally are identified as five aggregates . Hence, Anatta is not the opposite of atta but the nature of reality. It is wrong to take 'Anatta' as the opposite of 'Atta', for such a meaning would make one consider Anatta as denoting 'nothingness' it merely denotes the absence of an Atta.

Buddha's Anatta teaching is not about nothingness. The Buddha accepts the presence of aggregates ,what he denies is their permanency. He explains the rising of these according to a causal process. They do not get annihilated, but ceased to be when causes that produce them are absent. While denying the existence of a permanent individual or a person whom we identifies as "I", "I am" etc. The Buddha admitted for all practical purposes , the existence of the individual or the person. Those who attempt to equate the Buddha 's doctrine of Anatta as a

kind of annihilationism are merely misrepresenting The Buddha 's teaching. This, perhaps, is due to their failure to distinguish between the Buddha 's two methods of teaching namely **, Nīta-attha and neyya-attha**. Nīta –atta denotes those teachings whose meanings could be got at directly, who meanings could be drawn out clearly. Neyya-attha denotes those teachings the meanings of which have to be interpreted and drawn out. Thus, when the Buddha speaks of Anatta, he does not deny the existence of a person . What he says is that there is no person existing in the ultimate (Paramattha) sense. There are only aggregates , which are also always in flux, subject to change.

2.2.3. Satva.

So Anatta does not amount to nothingness . This is clearly seen from the famous saying attributed Bhikkhini Vajirā and found to occur in the "Bhikkhuni Saṃyutta" of the *"Saṃuttanikāya"*. It records an incident where she is confronted by Māra: The Māra asks:

"By whom has this being been created?
Where is the maker of the being?
Where has the being arisen?
Where does the being ceased? "

In reply Bhikkhuni Vajirā says:

"Why do you assume a being?
Māra, is that your speculative view?
This is a heap of sheer formations.
Here no being is found"

It is interesting see that she denies a being in the ultimate sense, but admits that what we call the 'being' is nothing but a 'heap of formation (Saṅkhārapuñja). Explaining further she says: ***" Just as, with an assemblage of parts -The word 'chariot' is used. So, when the aggregates exist,- There is the convention, 'a being'"(13)*** This makes it clear that the word 'being' is merely a conventional term (Sammuti sadda) to denotes a person. There is no 'being' in the ultimate sense; it is a conventional designation used to identify the collective of the aggregates. This clearly shows what the Buddha means by the term 'Anatta' It is used to mean that the individual is void (Suñña) of any permanent entity, by which ever name it is denoted ; whether it is called the soul, the self, the entity, the substance etc. The "Khandha Saṃyutta" of the *Saṃyuttanikāya* contains enough evidence to show that the Buddha 's analysis of the individual into khandhas was done for the purpose of demonstrating the absence of a 'self' that lie beneath or behind the Khandhas. The Buddha is very clear on this point, and all suttas in this "Saṃyutta" provide evidence for the Buddha 's stand point.

2.2.5. Anicca

By postulating khandhas the Buddha does not, in way , attempt to present them as permanent entities. He clearly shows their dependent nature ; that they are forces in flux, ever undergoing change. The "Ādittapariyāyasutta"(14)which is supposed traditionally to be the third sutta presented by Buddha , clearly shows that these aggregates , too, should not be considered as being permanent and then cling to .

They are described as being set on fire (Āditta). The "Khandha Saṃyutta"(15) also contain a similar sutta which describes the five aggregates as being burning. Seeing them thus , the noble disciples are instructed to develop revulsion (Nibbidāya) towards them, and not to cling to them taking them as permanent.

The purpose of the Anatta teaching is to drive home the fact that very thing is impermanent , subject to change, non-substantiality, and that all phenomena are interdependent. All these shows that phenomena is devoid of any such thing that could be called a soul (Atta) for the fundamental characteristic of the soul is its permanency. This fact is well brought out by the "Phenapiṇḍa Sutta" . This is very important sutta which clearly brings out the exact meaning of the term 'Anatta' summing up the essencelessness of all phenomena, specially the baseless notion that there is a permanent 'self' behind the five aggregates, the Buddha says;

" Form is like a lump of foam
Feeling like a water bubble,
Perception is like a mirage
Volitions like a plantain trunk
And consciousness like an illusion
So explained the kinsman of the sun"(16)

These similes that compare matter to a lump of form, feeling to a water-bubble, perception to a mirage , volition to a plantain true trunk and consciousness to an illusion, quite effectively show the non-substantiality of the five aggregates and thus completely debunking the the widely accepted belief in some kind of an permanent entity that

underlie the individual. This is a complete rejection of the soul-view (Sakkāyadiṭṭhi) as being void, hollow, insubstantial.

All these make it very clear that the primary purpose of the Anatta doctrine is to firmly drive home the truth that all phenomena is completely void (Suñña) of any such phenomena. That the belief in a soul or a self, variously referred to in the sutta as 'Sakkāya-diṭṭhi,' 'Attānu-diṭṭhi', 'Atta-vāda' etc is utterly ill-founded, that there is no empirical evidence to show the presence of such an entity either in the being or in anything outside the being. It is pointed out that the belief in a soul or self is a kind of clinging (Attavāda-upādāna) which forms a great obstacle to emancipation. As pointed out before the Buddha was faced with this primary task of countering the belief in an atta therefore, he used the term 'Anatta' to denote his teaching which completely rejected the belief is an "Atta'.

From the texts it is clear that what he meant by 'Anatta' is that everything is void, empty, devoid of a soul and he also uses the word Suñña (skt, Śūnya) to denote this true nature of reality. The well known sutta the "Mogharājamānapucchā",(17) found incorporated in the *Suttanipāta* uses the term 'Suñña' instead of Anatta. As already pointed in this sutta the Buddha admonishes the Mogharāja (a name) to view the world as being Suñña (empty, void); (Suññato lokaṃ avekkhassu) Suñña or void, empty of what? Not void is the sense of 'nothing' 'non-existing' but void of anything that could be called the 'soul' (Attena) or that is related to a soul (Attanīyena). Suñña, therefore ,is synonymous with 'Anatta' that is commonly used to mean the idea of Suñña in early suttas. Modern scholars point out that this is

done purposely for reasons . They point out that during the 6th century B.C. when Buddhism arose , the main philosophical problem the Buddha had to face was to counter argue against the Upanisadic concept of Ātman. To do this the Buddha coined the term Anatta. This term, it was accepted, directly countered the atta or the ātman concept. However, the Buddha pointed out also that 'Anatta' is synonymous with Suñña (skt.Śūnya) in the sense that it meant, devoid, or void or empty of an atta. In view of the philosophical background of the time the term 'Anatta' was preferred over Suñña.

However, under different circumstances, when the Sva-bhāva of the Sarvāstivādins gained ground, Śūnya was considered more apt to represent the Buddhist position with regard to the nature of reality, and it came to forefront overshadowing the earlier term Anatta. This the scholars say is not a shift of stance in Buddhism but a shift of emphasis from philosophical stand point of absence of an individual soul to absence of an any kind of entity underlying by the individual or even the elements (Dharmas). (18)

End notes

(1)*Rigveda* X, 62, 2.

(2)*Rigveda* I, 98, 9; X, 18, 10.

(3)*Atharvaveda*. V, 6, 11; XVII, 464.

(4) This word 'Pitṛ' is explained in the Moniar William's *Sanskrit- English Dictionary*. It refers to both the father and forefathers who have already departed from life. See A.B. Keith's *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanisads* . Motilal Banarisidass, Delhi, reprint, 1989, P403-415. See, also Rhys David's *Pāli English Dictionary*, under 'Peta', ' The Pāli term 'Peta' from Pa+ita =to go, meaning gone before, departed is the counter part of Sanskrit 'Preta', though the Pāli concept has undergoing certain changes.

(5)*Rigveda*. X, 14.8.

"Saṅgacchasva pitṛbhi: saṃyameneṣṭā- pūrthena paramevyoman

hitvā yāvadyaṃ punarastamehi – saṅgacchāsva tanvā suvarcā:"

(6) M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, Motilal Banarisidass, Reprint, 1994, .P .54

(7) Chandra Sharma. *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Motilal Banarisidass, Reprint, 1994, p 28.

(8) *Dīghanikāya, I*, "Sāmaññaphala sutta".

(9) Narendranath Bhattacharya, *Jaina Philosophy, Historical Outline*, Munishiram Manoharalal, India.

(10) *Vinayapiṭaka*, I, p10. *Saṃyuttanikāya*. V, p421.

"Pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi".

(11) *Vinayapṭaka*, I, p13.

" Atha kho bhagavā pañcavaggiye Bhikkhu āmantesi: rūpaṃ bhikkhave anattā, rūpaṃca h' idaṃ bhikkhave attā abhavissa, na idaṃ rūpaṃ ābādhāya saṃvatteya, labbhete ca rūpe evaṃ me rūpaṃ hotu, evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā ahositi.... Yasmā ca

kho bhikkhave rūpaṃ anattā, tasmā rūpaṃ ābādhāya saṃvattati, na ca labbhati rūpe evaṃ me rūpaṃ hotu, evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā ahosīti".

(12) *Vinayapiṭaka*, I, p13.

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(13)*Saṃyuttanikāya*, "Anattalakkanasutta"

(14)*Saṃyuttanika*, "Vajirāsutta".

" Yathā hi aṅga sambhāra- hoti saddo ratho iti

evaṃ khandhesu santesu- hoti satto'ti sammuti".

(15) *Vinayapttaka*, I, p346.

(16) *Saṃyuttanikāya* , III, p 71.

"Phenapiṇḍūpasamaṃ rūpaṃ- vedanābubbulūpamā

marīcikūpamā saññā- saṅkhārā kadalūpamā

māyūpamañca viññāṇaṃ- dīpitādiccabandhunā"

(17) *Suttanipāta*, "Pārāyanavagga", stanza, 1116.

(18) Sanath Nanayakkara, *Praṇāmalekha, Essays in honour of Ven: Dr. Medagama Vajiranana*, ed, Ven: prof; Bellanvila Wimalarathana, London Buddhist Vihara, 2003, p191.

End notes

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Chapter 3

ANATTA, SUÑÑA AND PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA

3.1 Two extremes.

It has already been pointed out that at the philosophical level it was the belief in a soul/self that was most predominant in the religions of the time of the rise of the Buddhism. Such a belief has been, and is a strong necessity that man feels because of his desire to be continued, without changing for ever, or even as long as one exists. Buddhism holds that two of the strongest motivating factors in man is his to desire to live (Jīvitu kāma), and his desire to avoid death (Amaritu kāma). Similarly strong is his desire for happiness (Sukhakāma). All these are natural instincts of all living beings, and specially so with humans. It these very same deep-rooted motives the Buddha identifies as Bhava-taṇhā, , Vibhava-taṇhā, ,and Kāma-taṇhā, .

3.1.1. Bhava-taṇhā, , vibhava-taṇhā,

Bhava-taṇhā, is desire or craving for continues existence, perpetuation of the individuality, for ever. This desire, in other words means the desire to avoid this inevitable recurrence of death. One is to attain immorality (Amṛtatava), that is to continue living. (Bhava-taṇhā,) make one self immortal; the other is to destroy one self completely and stop all chances of getting reborn. This is called Vibhava- taṇhā, .

the desire for destroying all possibilities of post-mortal existence. This desire could be due to the fear of facing possible evil consequences that one would have to face after death.

Whichever form this desire takes, it naturally leads to the assumption of a soul, an entity that either gets reborn and continue or gets completely destroyed at death. The first led to the metaphysical conception of the soul, a soul that is immaterial, different from the body and hence purely metaphysical.

3.1.2. Sassatavāda and Ucchedavāda

This is the concept of soul of Eternalists (Sassatavādins). In the belief of the annihilationists (Ucchedavāda), the soul is purely material (Ayaṃ atta rūpo cātummahābhūtiko)–this soul is constituted of the four primary elements ie, earth , water, fire, wind) and hence, they were relieved by believing that when the body gets destroyed at death (Kāyassa bhedā paraṃ maraṇā) the soul which is material and hence identical with the body (Taṃ jīvaṃ taṃ sarīraṃ), would also get destroyed, thus putting and end to all possible recurrences of rebirth and hence, also the possibility of undergoing the evil consequences of one's evil deeds.

For the Sassatavādins (eternalists) the body was a bondage , a cage a prison in which the soul is held a captive, a prisoner . Therefore, their attempt was directed at weakening and breaking up this body-prison, thus enabling the "soul" to escape and unite with its original sources. (1) This philosophical outlook that emerge from the

psychological urge to attain some sort immorality led them to believe in the practice of self-mortification(Attakilamathānuyoga).

This is a practice that advocated giving of severe physical pain by excessively controlling the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, mortifying the flesh- body of the individual by depriving it even of its basic needs. Both the Upanisadic teachings and the Jains ardently believed that this is the most effective method of realising the soul from the body in which it is caged. They held that this is the best way to weaken the influence of the body (Sarīra) over the soul (Ātman/Jīva).

The annihilationists adopted another extreme. They, as they believed the soul to be getting annihilated at the destruction of the body, firmly held that the body which is identical with the soul should be well nourished and provided in excess the sensual pleasure. They even argued that, if not one would have to regret at the, time of death for not gratifying one's sensual pleasures. They presented a very common sense argument and maintained that this life is the only opportunity the one gets for self gratification and , therefore, one should make the maximum use of it.

This led them to proclaim the path of self-gratification (self-indulgence) which gave them to opportunity of pleasing the body excessively by making it enjoy all sensual pleasures to the maximum. This is Kāmasukhallikānuyoga. This is the practice advocated by teachers like Ajitaṭakesakambali, one of the most prominent materialist at the time. What is evident from the above is that the belief is a self,- whether it is the metaphysical or the physical self- led to the

philosophical view point of either Sassatavāda (eternalism) or Ucchedavāda (annihilatinsm) . Based on these two diametrically opposed philosophical stand points they arrived at equally two diametrically opposed practice of self-mortification (Attakilamathānuyoga) and self-gratification (Kāmasukhalikānuyoga).

The Anatta doctrine the Buddha presented was aimed at showing the futility of both these philosophies and practices. It was the Buddha's position that it is the false belief in the existence of a self- in whichever form that lies at the foot of these misconceived philosophical views and religious practices. It is to show this fallacy that the Buddha , in his numerous ways (Anekapariyāyena) preached, bringing in to highlight the non-existence of such a soul. As appointed out before such Suttas occur abundantly in the *Nikāyas*. From the preaching of the "Anattalakkhaṇasutta" to the group of Five (Pañcavaggiya) the Buddha, whenever the opportunity arose, attempted to drive in hard the fact that it is a fallacy to believe in a soul which does not truly exist.

He strongly argued that if such a soul exists then it should be observable at least by the super-cognitive abilities (Abhiññā). But, this was not the case. Even Jhānic attainments, he showed ,do not provide the existence of such an entity. In Buddhism even Jhānic attainments, too, are to be viewed as being subject to Anicca, Dukkha and Anatta. If so , how can such Jhānic attainments be equated with any kind of union, even temporary union, with a permanent soul. By viewing jhanic attainments as mere mind-made states. Buddhist practice of meditation prevent any practitioner giving a wrong interpretation to

such practices as a kind of union with or absorption in to a transcendental reality. Besides, the whole process of Jhāna is open to methodical analysis and , hence, there is nothing mystic about at. While thus rejecting with reason, the belief in a soul as a metaphysical imagination, the Buddha also demonstrated the futility of the two practices namely, Attakilamathānuyoga and Kāmasukhallikānuyoga. In the very first discourse,that is the "Dhammacakkhappavattanasutta" (Vin. I, 10 ff, S. IV,20ff), the Buddha commenced his preaching with this rejection. This itself shows how important this issue had been at that time. His very first words of admonition to the group of five are:

> ***" O Bhikkhus these two extremes should not be followed by a recluse. What two? This engagement in self-gratification is low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble and leading to ill being, and this self-mortification which is painful, ignoble, and leading to ill being"(2)***

It is to be noted that the Buddha equally firmly rejecting the soul view, both metaphysical and physical, uses more harsh term to condemn the practice of self-gratification. With reference to this practice Buddha describes it as lowly (Hīno) vulgar (Gammo) worldly or secular (Pothujjaniko) ignoble (Anariyo) and conducive to ill being (Anattasaṃhito). With regard to self-tormentation he use only the terms Dukkho (painful), Anariyo (ignoble) and Anattasaṃhito (conducive to ill being).

His total condemnation of the Ucchedavāda philosophy and practice is due to the fact that it leads to total rejection of all ethics, and inducement to follow a path that encourages a base, unrefined form of living, engrossed in unlimited enjoyment of sensual pleasure .

This is against his attempt to elevate the man from his lowly behaviour, a behaviour which the texts describes as 'swimming' with current (Anusotagāmi), and make him swim against the current (Paṭisotagāmi). The acceptance of a soul is bad enough when a Ucchedavādins maintain that it gets destroyed along with the body, it signals the total collapse of the moral life, the belief in the efficacy of Kamma, moral behaviour and individual responsibility.

Eternalists, accepted rebirth and consequently Kamma and Vipāka (good and bad deeds with their consequences) and the Buddha is less harsh on them. But as they advocate self-mortification the Buddha very rightly describes it as painful (Dukkho). Similarly, from the Buddha's point of view it no way help to uplift the man to a noble level and hence ignoble (Anariyo); and as it does no good but only harm, obviously physical harm and spiritually misleading, it is described as Anatthasaṃhito. The repeated rejection of the soul view and practices based on this is done with purpose. The *Nikāya* texts show that there were monks who in spite of the Buddha 's open rejection and the two extremes practices, kept on holding to them. Sāti is one such monk. As the "Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhayasutta" of the *Majjhimanikāya* records a Bhikkhu called Sāti held the view : "***As I understand the Dhamma taught by the fortunate one (Bhagavā) it is the same consciousness (Viññāṇa) that runs and wanders through the round of rebirths, and not another".(3)*** This nothing but the soul view held by the Upanisadic thinkers. They identified the soul (Ātman) with consciousness (Viññāṇa). It had such an impact on monks like Sāti, in spite of Buddha 's repeated warnings and admonitions, they

continued clinging to such views. The Buddha says that monks like Sāti shows that they have not even received a bit of the warmth of his teaching, (Na usmikato pi imasmiṃ dhammavinaye) and Sāti by his wrong grasp of the doctrine not only is misrepresenting the Buddha but even injuring the himself and storing up much demerit.

This Sutta is also important for the fact that it presents a very modernistic interpretation of the consciousness. Even modern western philosophers like Decorates mentioned that " I think, therefore, I am " (cogito, ergo sum). The Buddha over 2500 years ago already pointed out that consciousness is not a static, permanent entity, and hence not the soul. He very emphatically stated , over and over again, that consciousness is dependently arisen, since without conditions there is noorigination of consciousness (4).Sāti could not have been the one and only monk to have clung to this soul view, which was widely prevalent then: this sort of admonition by the Buddha shows how this belief must have affected the members of his order. Those who held this view naturally must have got inclined towards Attakilamathānuyoga, which the Buddha condemned as an non-beneficial (Anatthasaṃhita) practice a practice that is painful and ignoble.

3.1.3. Kāmataṇhā, and Ariṭṭha

There were others who inclined towards materialism. The "Alagaddūpamasutta" also of the *Majjhimanikāya*, records a case of monk who adamantly clung to the materialistic view. His name was Arittha. He held the view that : ***"As I understand the Dhamma taught***

by the Fortunate one those things called obstruction (Antarāyika dhammā) by the Fortunate one are not able to obstruct one who engages in them".(5) Here what is meant by 'things called obstruction' (Antarāyika dhammā) is enjoyment sensual pleasures, specially sexual relation. The materialists were of the view that enjoyment of sensual pleasures is the way to emancipation, and hence ,they advocated Kāmasukhallikānuyoga- sense or self-gratification. The Buddha utterly condemned , even by using terms which are more severe than the ones used to criticize Attakilamathānuyoga practice. It is in spite of such utter condemnation that monks like Aritha persisted in holding the view opposite to preached by the Buddha.

The whole of the Buddha 's teaching has only one taste, that is the taste of freedom (Ayaṃ dhammavinayassekaraso, vimuttiraso: A. IV, 203). （6） The Buddha 's teaching is directed towards the attainment of freedom, and hence, it inspires one to develop dispassion (Nibbidāya) and detachment (Virāga). That the Buddha 's Dhamma is for detachment and dispassion is clearly stated through out the texts(7). This Dhamma is for dispassion, detachment and let going . In such a Dhamma enjoyment of sensual pleasure, and more so, the excessive enjoyment of sensual pleasure (Kāmasukhallikānuyoga) finds no place. Yet, some monks who could not completely give up their former beliefs, whether about eternalism or annihilationsm clung to them tenaciously disregarding the Buddha 's constant admonistions against them. With regard to Sāti it was his attachment to the belief in a permanent entity ; in the case of Ariṭṭha it was his

belief in materialism. So the Buddha very elaborately demonstrated the evil nature of enjoyment sense pleasure. He reminded Ariṭṭha

> ***" Through whom you, foolish man, do you come to understand that I have taught the dhamma in this manner? .... Some pleasures are said by me to be Sātisfaction , of much pain, of much tribulation, where is the evil consequences that follow out wign the pleasures they give. Sense pleasures are likened by me to a skeleton , to a lump of meat, to a torch of dry grass, to a pit of glowing enters, to a dream, to something borrowed, to the fruits of a trace , to a slaughter-hours, to an imPāling state . Some pleasure are compared by me to a snake-head, of much pain, ...And you foolish man, not only misrepresents me because of your wrong grasp (of the doctrine), but also injuries your own self and give rise to much demerit which would be for a long time for your unhappiness and sorrow".***

That those practices of Attakilamathānuyoga and Kāmasukhallikānuyoga are founded on the wrong understanding of the nature of reality is very clearly demonstrated by the Buddha. In both these suttas the Buddha tries to drive in the fact that that it is the belief in a self ,whether metaphysical or physical that leads to these extreme views and practices. Such beliefs make one extremely selfish, makes one strongly hold on to the eternalist view of life or to its opposite , the annihilationist-view of life. This selfish out look blinds one with regard to the true nature of reality. One's world –view thus becomes biased , prejudiced as it is not based on facts but as dictated by one's selfish outlooks, that is as decided by one's likes (Ruci) and dislikes (Aruci). Such a persons sees only the extremes. He sees things as either being eternally existing (Atthi) or as getting annihilated (Natthi).

As pointed out in the "Kaccāyanagottasutta" of the *Saṃyuttanikāya,* these are the two views that the world commonly

resort to. The world find it difficult to transcend these extremes and adopt a middle point of view. Only the Buddhas are capable of showing this and lead the followers, who are ready give a hearing out the right path. This doctrine preached by the middle (Tathāgato majjhena dhammaṃ deseti) is the doctrine of dependent origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda), and the practice based on it is the middle practice (Majjhimā paṭipadā) also called the Noble Eightfold Path (Ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga).

3.2.4. Sāti's conception of viññāṇa

That is why the Buddha immediately after rebuking Sāti (see "Mahāhataṇhāsṅkhaya Sutta") for holding the Viññāṇa to be a permanent entity, explains the dependent origination nature of Viññāṇa. Though this is pointedly concerned with the true nature of Viññāṇa (consciousness) , it is in fact a criticism of the self-view, for in this instance, Sāti held Viññāṇa to be the self. The Buddha says:

> *" Bhikkhus, consciousness is reckoned by this particular condition dependent upon which it arises. when consciousness arises dependent on the eye and form, it is reckoned as eye-consciousness (Cakkhu-viññāṇa); when consciousness arises dependent on the ear and sounds, it is reckoned as ear-consciousness (Sota-viññāṇa); when consciousness arises dependent on nose and odoars, it is reckoned as nose-consciousness (Ghāna-viññāṇa); when consciousness arises dependent on tongue and tasters, it is reckoned as tongue-consciousness,(Jivhā-viññāṇa);when consciousness arises dependent on body and tangibles, it is reckoned as body-consciousness, (Kāya-viññāṇa) ; when consciousness arises dependent on the mind and mind-objects it is reckoned as mind-consciousness (Mano-viññāṇa).*

In order to make this fact more clear the Buddha makes use of the following simile:

> ***" Just as fire is reckoned by the partiCūlar condition dependent on which it burns- when fire burns dependent on logs, it is reckoned as log fire; when fire burns dependent on faggots, it is reckoned as faggots fire; when fire burns dependent on grass, it is reckoned as grass fire; when fire burns dependent on cow dung, it is reckoned as cow dung fire; when fire burns dependent on chaff, it is reckoned as chaff-fire; when fire burns dependent on rubbish it is reckoned as rubbish- fire; so, too, consciousness is reckoned by the particular conditions dependent on which it arises".***

This simile has a very deep philosophical significance. It is purposely directed to show that there is no Viññāṇa transmigrating. Just as any fire ceases when the condition on which it is dependent ceases, so does Viññāṇa cease to be, when the particular condition on which it is dependent ceases to be when this is the case, how can Sāti speak of a Viññāṇa transmigrating from existence to existence. This makes it clear that the Buddha's main concern at this early stage of his teaching is to explain, as clearly as possible, the absence of anything that could be described as a permanent, immutable soul/self or anything related to such a soul. Explaining further, the Buddha demonstrates how the five aggregates (Pañcakkhandha) have come to be (Bhūtaṃ). Thus, he points out that not only the consciousness , even the five aggregates arise depending on conditions. The rest of the Sutta is mainly focused on demonstrating the dependent origination nature of everything. It lays out the whole formula of dependent origination and explains it both in the forward and reverse order. He explains how important it is to know and see for oneself this

true nature of reality. This knowledge , that is knowing and seeing (Jānaṃ-passaṃ), of the true nature of reality has to come through personal experience, not as a knowledge or a belief based on the teaching of another, whether it be the Buddha himself or another teacher. It has to be personally realized. The Buddha says:

> ***" Good, Bhikkhus, so you have been .... by me with this Dhamma, which is visible here and now, immediately effective, inviting inspection, onward leading , to be explained by the wise for themselves. (Svakkhāto bhagavatā dhammo sandiṭṭhhiko akāliko ehipassiko opanaiko paccattaṃ veditabbo viññuhīti"***

When we knows and sees in this manner we would not be involved with the past things: ' were we in the past,? What were we in the past, -? Having been what, what did we become in the past, ? Nor would we be involved with similar pondering pertaining to future. It is our wrong belief in the existence of a soul/self that forces us to bring to such pondering about the past and future and take us away from the present which is the only time we could profitably use to mould our lives and lead us towards emancipation.

3.2. Diṭṭhi

At this point it is important to recall another very important sutta. This is the "Brahmajāla Sutta", occurring in the *Dīghanikāya*. (8) This sutta is an attempt to explain methodically the various speculative belief that were prevalent at that time, and also to show the dangers that are sure to fall upon one who accepts them. It enumerates sixty-two views that arise due to the belief in a soul, and

says: there cannot be any view out side these and these speculative views arise either from 'wrong' reasoning or ill-founded meditative practices , both of which are harmful as they are founded as the belief in a self. Hence these speculative views lead to Dukkha because they are all misdirected attempts to search for reality. The Sutta also explains that all these speculative views are concerned either with the past or the future .

The Buddha presented this Anatta doctrine to show the futility of these views as well as to explains the evil consequence that are certain to fall upon these who dogmatically cling to them. It is specifically to dissuade people following such false speculative views that the Buddha said in the "Alagaddūpama Sutta" " *you should abandon even Dhamma, how much more for Adhamma* (Dhammāpi pahātabbā pageva adhammā). This does not ,mean the rejection of the Dhamma, but the rejection of any attachment even to the Dhamma, however good and beneficial, it may be cause attached springs from soul-view.

3.2.1. Attānudiṭṭhi

It is not just the belief in a soul that create Dukkha, but the tenacious clinging to such a belief, and following a practice based on it. That is why Buddhism always refer to it as <u>theory of soul</u> (Attavāda) <u>view pertaining to a soul</u> (Attānudiṭṭhi). This dogmatic acceptance of a soul is called Attavāda-upādāna, which is a great hindrance to emancipation. The purpose of the Buddha 's constant admonitions to monks is to remind about the dangers of such dogmatic changing to a belief in a soul (Atta) or anything pertaining to a soul(Attanīya). It is

interesting to note that Buddha in the "Alagaddūpama Sutta" enumerates six possible standpoints (Diṭṭhiṭṭhāna) for views. He says:

> " ***Bhikkhus there are these six standpoints for views, what the six? Here Bhikkhus, an untaught ordinary person (Assutavā puthujjano) who has no regard for noble one, and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, regards material form thus: This is mine , this I am, this is my self (Etaṃ mama , eso'ham asmi, eso me attā'ti)***"(9).

Similarly regards the other four aggregates that is feeling (Vedanā), perception (Saññā) mental formation (Saṅkhāro) and consciousness (Viññāṇa) as this is mine and so on. But the Buddha teaches the opposite way of looking at them, that is to regard them as 'not mine' etc. This way of seeing the five aggregates is very necessary. If one were to consider them as 'this is mine' etc, then it would lead one to believe that after death I shall be permanent , everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, I shall endure as long as eternality. This is full fledged belief in eternalism (Sassatavāda) and it is to counter-act this false speculative view that the Buddha presented Anatta doctrine. The Buddha , in answer to a question by one of the disciples , says that it is the agitation (Paritassana) one feels when he knows that there is no permanent self, that makes him cling to such speculative belief, But if one sees things in their true nature, as to how they have come to be Bhūtaṃ), then there would not be such agitation in him, inducing to him cling to a false belief in the existence of a soul. The Buddha ;s main contention against this belief in a self is, that it produces Dukkha . Therefore, he says , "***Bhikkhus, you may well cling to that doctrine of self that would not arouse sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair in one who clings to it***". But

the problem is that ,there is no such doctrine for the belief in a self, in whichever form, only gives rise to Dukkhas. This why the Buddha admonishes his followers to give up soul speculation view and see things as they have come to be. This could be done by hearing the Tathagata or his disciples' teaching for the stilling of all formation, for the relinquishing of all attachments, for the destruction of craving, for dispassion, for Nibbāna. When one knows this Dhamma, well taken there will be no any agitation regarding the non-existence of a soul. This Anatta doctrine is by no means a kind of annihilation, though some have , even during the time of the Buddha , attempted to show that the Buddha is a teacher of annihilationsm. The Buddha himself was fully aware of such misrepresentation of his teaching for he says: " ***..... I have been baselessly, vainly, falsely and wrongly misrepresented by some recluses and brahmans thus: ' the recluse Gotama is one who lead astray he teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the extermination of an existing being'."*** It is very well seen that the Buddha explanation of the realization of Nibbāna has nothing to do with the destruction of a soul. Nor has it any thing to do with the belief in a union of the individual soul (Ātman) with the universal soul (Paramātman). This cannot be, because the Buddha at no time did posit the existence of a soul. Then ,how could he teach about either the destruction of a soul or its union with a super-soul?.

3.2.2. Attānudiṭṭhi and Anatta

So , to say that the Buddhist Anatta doctrine is Annihilationism is to misrepresent the Buddha (10). Anatta is not a view or a belief ,

but a method of seeing this true nature of things. One has to remember this fact very well . If one takes this as an alternative view to the view about the existence of a self (Attānudiṭṭhi), then misleads the person who so considers it. This Anatta teaching is not even the Buddha 's "view" about the individual and the world. It is merely a statement of fact regarding the true nature of things. If one takes this Anatta teaching as a view , then one would be induced to cling to it and hold it as the truth and denounce all other views (Idameva saccaṃ moghamññaṃ). The Buddha never encourage such an attitude . By adopting Anatta as a view, one would merely get entangled is a net of views just as those who take the Atta-view. Therefore, 'Anatta' should be considered as a method of knowing and seeing the true nature of the individual and hence, not hold it as the ultimate truth and pay honour to it.

It has already been pointed out that what the Buddha meant by saying that everything is 'Anatta' is that every thing is devoid or void (Suñña) of a soul or anything connected with a soul.(Suññо attena vā attanīyena vā ti). There fore, to view everything that is the individual as well as the world as Anatta is to view then as 'empty' (Suñña) of a soul anything pertaining to a soul. Just as Ācārya Nāgārjuana uses his Śūnyatā as a method of understanding the true nature of things, early Buddhism predominantly make use of 'Anatta' as a meaning of seeing and knowing how things have come to be. Therefore, there is no need to underscore the point that Anatta doctrine is not another view, a view that is meant merely to replace the absence of an

individual-self (Puggala-atta)and to be cling to. Anatta is not of such a limited application.

3.2.3. Mogharājasutta.

In this instance we have to recollect once again the advice given by the Buddha to Mogharāja which is recorded in the "Mogharājamanavapuccha" in the *Suttanipāta.* Therein the question is raised regarding how to view the 'world' , not merely the individual, but the world including the individual, that is the whole phenomenal world.**"Kathaṃ lokaṃ avekkhantaṃ maccurājā na passati"** ***(looking at the world in which way does not it not enable the Death to see).*** Simply, the question is "what should be the world view which would help to transcend samsara?" The answer is that , one should look at the world as being empty; abandon the view pertaining to a soul" So Anatta is the world view one should adopt but not as his own view, but as the true view of reality.

It is clear that to view the world as 'Suñña' it is necessary to abandon the view pertaining to a soul. As long as one persists with clinging to a soul-view, there is no possibility of seeing the world as empty, because the soul-view makes one become utterly subjective in approach. But the rejection of a soul give rise to a problem , a serious one at that very early time itself, as what transmigrates from birth to another. How could re-birth be explained , if a surviving entity is denied. Monks like Sāti would have been faced with the same problem. The main reason for such a question is the belief in the belief is assumption that the 'Anatta' teaching of the Buddha is a

kind nihilism, a teaching that advocated the destruction of all surviving at death. As pointed out often by the Buddha the world is not usually able to avoid the extreme attitudes , points of view. So, the world finds it difficult to transcend the extremes, and view things from a new position, from which they would be able to get a fuller and an objective view. Perhaps, the Buddha is the first to do so, and it is his boldness and daring to brake away from the traditional way of thinking that made him become enlightened regarding the true nature of things.

3.3. Language and conceptions.

Yet, the Buddha had to explain the process of continuity of a being in Samsāra. For this he had to use language, and language consists of verbs and noun with specific meanings attached the them conventionally . This is a perennial problem and Buddhism ,too, faces with this.

3.3.1. Gandhabba and Antarābhava

The suttas, specially the "Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhayasutta", explaining the conception of a human being give three factors which are essential. Thus it is said , for a successful conception (Gabbassa avakkhanti) there should be the conjunction of three things: (11)

1. Union between parents,
2. The mother should be in the proper period for conception and
3. **Gandhabba** should be present.

The first two factors present no problem. What is meant by gandhabba? This is not an uncommon term which is the parallel of Sanskrit **Gandharva**, usually meaning a musician , a seeker etc, and often a heavenly musician (12). There are few other shades of meanings too, but never help to understand the sense in which the word is used in this context. Explaining this word some suggest that this should be read as Gantabba , meaning 'one that should be going', thus suggesting a dynamic surviving factor. The word gandabba caused problem even to early scholars and ,perhaps, it lies at the root of the concept of **Antarā-bhava** , meaning, a state of intermediate existences. Such a state is not accepted in early Buddhism, though later schools seem to have adopted such a concept. If we accept a state of intermediate existence' then it amounts to the acceptance of an immutable surviving entity.

The Brahmin explain rebirth insisted on two factors: permanency and identity. They said the soul is the surviving factor, it is permanent and therefore, the soul the succeeding birth for it is the same soul that transmigrate. The Buddha did not accept this . As he understood phenomena , it is always is a flux. As a dynamic process of forces. As a combination of aggregates .Therefore, it is not a static, but continuously changing and moving. Hence, it is not identical at two moments if so how could it be in two births? Though the Buddha denied permanency and identity, he did not deny the survival of beings after death. His teaching is not a kind of annihilationism. Therefore, he accepted a surviving factor. But this factor as it is continuously changing is not , through out it samsaric

existences, identical. Therefore, what the Buddha as posited is change and continuity, as against permanency and identity of the Bharmin's teaching.

3.3.2. Viññāṇa and Paṭiccasamuppāda

That Viññāṇa is a vital factor for the development an embroyo? (Gabbha) is accepted in Buddhism Thus, the "Mahānidānasutta" of the *Diganikāya* says: If Viññāṇa were not to descend into the mother womb ,or if hiving descendent into the mother's womb were to leave, then childbirth will not be successful.(13). This teaching that Viññāṇa is the surviving factor may have been quite prevalent from very early times. With the rejection of a permanent soul, it is apparent that acceptance of such a surviving-factor become quite necessary . It may be that Sāti misinterpreted this teaching, and considered Viññāṇa to be permanent and immutable. Hence his strong belief that it is this Viññāṇa itself. (Tadeveda viññāṇaṃ) and not any other (Anaññaṃ) that runs and wanders (Sandhāvati-saṃsarati).

Thus , while not denying that it is the Viññāṇa that functions as the surviving-factor the Buddha very emphatically points out that Viññāṇa is dependently arisen . This Viññāṇa that function as the link between two births is referred to in the suttas as Saṃvattanika-viññāṇa (the consciousness) that continues evolving . It is this Viññāṇa that later came to be referred to as patisandhih Viññāṇa – rebirth consciousness. This Saṃvattanika-viññāṇa is also called Viññāṇa sota (stream of consciousness). Hence, it is possible to

conclude that the Buddha admitted a surviving factor and this factor is consciousness referred to by different names depending on the function it and performs. What is very clear is that , nowhere in the suttas is this Viññāṇa describe as a static , permanent entity. It is always described as a dynamic force moving, following and evolving. Perhaps it is not wrong to conclude ,also that the word Gandhabba is another word used to describe this Viññāṇa(14).

3.3.3. Paṭiccasamuppāda

Another noteworthy characteristics of the Buddha 's attempt at showing the futility of the belief in a soul is that this whole issue is discussed in the context of dependent origination. The nature of the individual, his composition, the five constituent factors, the nature of the world are dealt with in the context of dependent origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda). Everything according to Buddhism is dependently arisen (Paṭiccasamuppāda). There is nothing in this world that is arisen without causes and condition. As shown above, even viññā a is dependently arises (Aññatra paccayā natthi viññāṇassa sambhavo). All phenomena, that is all things that are dependently arisen have three characteristics. They are impermanent ,(Anicca), non-satisfactory (Dukkha) and non-substantial or no-self (Anatta). The simple equation given in early suttas is that everything is compounded (Saṃkhata/saṅkhāra). That means everything is an aggregate of other things. All compounded things are impermanent (Sabbe saṅkhāra Aniccā). Whatever is compounded is non-satisfactory (Yadaniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ).

Similarly, it is said that whatever is Dukkha is without self (Yaṃ dukkhaṃ tadanattā).

What is clear from this is that, Anicca and Anatta are the main characteristics of all phenomena. These characteristics generate , in ordinary beings (Puthujjana), a deep sense of non-Sātisfactoriness. It is also seen that Anicca and Anatta are almost same in meaning. What is Anicca is Anatta and what is Anatta is Anicca. A-nicca (=Skt, A-nitya) means what lacks permanency , what is subject to change, what is immutable. Anatta also, means the absence of any permanent entity. They are Anatta and Anicca , because all phenomena are collections of a number aggregates. Even the minutest atom is so according to Buddhism . There aggregates themselves are not independent discrete elements. Everything is inter-dependent, and hence inter-related.

The Buddha in order to explain the nature of existence, evolved a new terms and one such term is Paṭiccasamuppāda (skt. Pratītya-samutpāda). This is a unique explanation, though the Buddha does not claim that as his own theory. One of the most profound declarations on Paṭiccasamuppāda by the Buddha is found to occur in the *Saṃyuttanikāya* (II.25).

> ***" And what Bhikkhus, is dependent origination? With birth as the condition again and death comes to be; whether there is an arising of Tathāgatas or no arising of Tathāgatas, that element still persists, the stableness of the Dhamma, the fixed course of the Dhamma, specific conditionality. A Tathāgata awakens to this and breaks through it. Having done so , he explains it, teaches it, proclaims it, establish it," (15).***

This is not a speculative theory but what the Buddha observed to be taking place in phenomena. This is not a theory, but a descriptive presentation of a law that is operative in phenomena. He (Dhamma-ṭṭhititā). He observed the uniformity of phenomena (Dhammaniyāmatā) and their inter-dependence (or inter-relation= Idappaccayatā). This experience he obtained by observing nature, and he had to put in to language for the purpose of communicating it to others. As he saw this as operating in all spheres, he had to use rather broad and comprehensive term, without disregarding aptness of the terminology he was using. Finally, he presented the general law of Paṭiccasamuppāda as follows:

" When that is present, this comes to ,
on the arising of that ,this arises
when that is absent, this does not come to be ,
on the cessation of that, this cease"(16).

This general law is applicable to all sphere: physical, psychological, ethical, social, economical, political and so on. And the Buddha applied this formula in presenting causal explanations of happenings pertaining to these spheres. However, the Buddha's main concern was the explanation of the prevalence of Dukkha and the possibility of its cesSātion. Thus, in the "Alagaddūpamasutta" the Buddha says: ***'Bhikkhus, both formerly and now what I teach is about suffering and the cessation of suffering,*** **(Pubbecahaṃ etarahi ca dukkhaṃ paññapemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ).** Therefore, he applied this general law to this specific problems of Dukkha and cessation of Dukkha. Through this application he

evolved his own causeal explanation of the arising of Dukkha and the cessation of Dukkha.

3.3.4. Anatta, Suñña, Paṭiccasamuppāda and phenomena.

However, the relevance of the law of Paṭiccasamuppāda should not be limited to the problems of Dukkha and its cessation, through this is the general attitude shown in Theravāda Buddhism. This is why in Theravāda writings Paṭiccasamuppāda law has been viewed and analyzed in a very limited context. This is not so in philosophies like the Madhyamaka. Ācārya Nāgārjuna has taken it as the general law applicable to all phenomena and , hence ,rightly identified it as the central philosophy of the Buddhism.

In fact this is the spirit in which this Buddha himself applied this law to explain all happenings. In fact as shown earlier, the Buddha himself, in the "Kaccayānagottasutta" call it the doctrine preached by the middle (Majjhena dhamma).Basing on this Ācārya Nāgārjuna refers to it as the Madhyama pratipad.

Understanding the operation of this law the Buddha was able to avoid the two extremes of eternalism (Sassatavāda) and Annihilationism (Ucchedavāda). Through this understanding , he clearly saw the absence of any , eternably persisting entity or and entity that gets annihilated at death. He saw phenomena as being in a flux, always changing and continuing. The Buddha saw the interdependent nature of all constituent factors of phenomena, their inter-relation , which further convinced him that all phenomena are empty of any independent, permanent , immutable entity. Therefore,

he described all phenomena as Suñña or empty and advised his followers to view them as being empty of any permanent substance.

Thus, it is seen that term Anatta (Skt. Anātma), Suñña (Skt. Śūnya) and Paṭiccasamuppāda (skt. Pratītyasamutpāda) are different modes of expressing the same fact, that is the fact that all phenomena are devoid, empty of anything that could be called the soul or anything pertaining to a soul. The Buddha predominantly used the term Anatta ,as the major problem he had to counter was the Ātma-doctrine that was widely prevalent then, specially the eternalist doctrine of the Upanisadic thinkers . Occasionally , he did used the word 'Suñña' in explaining what he meant by Anatta. To him both covered same range of meaning.

In explaining of this absent of a permanent soul, the Buddha used the Paṭiccasamuppāda law and demonstrated the inter-dependence and inter-relations of all phenomena as well as their constitute factors. Thus further clarified the absence of any permanent entity. The paccaya theory-the law of conditional relations-which is well enunciated n Abhidhamma. Specially in the text called the Paṭṭhāna shows the relativity of all phenomena and brings out the true nature of things, how thing come to be dependent on and in relation to other things.

As Anatta came to be as a fact accepted by all scholars, there was no need to use the term and emphasize the teaching developed by it. It came to be an accepted fact that need no reiteration. As shown before , it was the substantialist and realist views put forward by later cholars like Sarvāstivāda and Soutrāntika ,

that induced teachers like Nāgārjuna, to give more emphasis to 'Śūnya', and demonstrates that not only the individual but all elements (Dharma) are also impermanent as they are devoid of any permanent substance. In doing this Ācārya Nāgārjuna very rightly understood that the Pratītyasamutpāda doctrine ,too, is for the purpose of highlighting that all phenomena are relative and, therefore , empty/void/devoid of any permanent substance. Hence, he rightly concluded:

" We state that what ever is dependently arising, that is emptiness. That is dependent upon convention. That itself is the middle path" (17)

Ācārya Nāgārjuna in order to show that what is meant Śūnya and Pratītyasamutpāda are same declares:

" A thing that is not dependently arises is not evident. For that reason , a thing that is non-empty is indeed not evident" (18).

The teaching that all phenomena is Anicca (impermanent) is Anatta (with an everlasting underlying entity). Similarly, when it is said that all phenomena should be viewed as Suñña (Skt.Śūnya) what is meant is that all phenomena should be views as being uttering devoid , empty of any permanent substance or entity. When it is said that all phenomena are dependently arisen (Paṭiccasamuppanna= Skt-Pratītyasamutpanna) it means that there is no independent existence in any phenomena. The "Nalakalāpa Sutta" of the *Saṃyuttanikāya* aptly demonstrates the inter-relatedness of all phenomena.

" Just as friend, two bundles of reed were to stand one supporting the other, even so consciousness is dependent on name and form, and name and form is dependent on

consciousness, and six spheres of sense on name and form, contact on six sense-spheres , falling on contact , craving on feeling , grasping on craving, becoming and old-age ,death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, unhappiness, and despair are dependent on birth……. If one of these two boundless of reed is drawn out , the latter is drawn, the former would fall down. Even so , friend with the cesSātion of name and form consciousness ceases, with the cesSātion of consciousness , name and form ceases…"(19).

This clearly shows that there is not only inter-dependence among the different factors of phenomena , there is also mutual, reciprocal relations among them. While early Theravāda seems to emphasized more the inter-dependence, philosophies like Madhyamaka seems to give more emphasis to relatedness. But this is only a difference in emphasis, the spirit of it namely, that there is no unchanging, immutable, permanent, everlasting in phenomena, remains same.

End -notes

1. The Jains also held a similar view with regard to their Jīva, the soul.
2. *Vinayapiṭaka,* I., *Saṃyuttanikāya*. IV, p 4.

   "Deve'me bhikkhave antā pabbajitena na sāvitabba .katame dve yocāyaṃ kāmesu kāmasukhallikānuyogo, hīno gammo, pothujjaniko anariyo anattasamhito, yo cāyaṃ atthakilamathānuyogo dukkho anariyo anatta saṃhito."
3. *Majjhimanikāya* I, p256. "Evaṃ kho ahaṃ āvso bhagavatā dhammaṃ desitaṃ sandhāvati saṃsarati anaññaṃ ti"
4. *Majjhimanikāya*,1. p256. "Nanu mayā paccayā mogha purisa anekapariyāyena paṭiccasamuppannaṃ viññāṇam vuttaṃ aññatra paccayā natthi viññāṇassa saṃbhao"
5. *Majjhimanikāya*, "Alagaddūmapamasutta"

6. *Anguttaraniikāya,* IV, p203.
7. *Vinayapiṭaka,* III p19, "Bhagavatā anekapariyāyena dhammo desito viragāya dhammo desito, no sarāgāya, visamyogāya dhammo desito no saṃyogāya, anupādānāya dhammo desito no saupādāya"
8. *Majjhimanikāya*, "Mahāhatthipadopamasutta."
9. For an elaborate discussions of the "Brahmajālasutta" see Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Discourse on the All Embracing Net of Views,* Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy , Sri Lanka, reprint, 1992.
10. The commentary explain that the view 'this is mine' is generated by craving (Taṇhā,). The notion 'This I am' by conceit (Mama) and 'This is myself' by wrong views (Micchā-diṭṭhi). All these are different manifestation of selfishness, arising from the speculative views of the existence of a self.
11. Regarding such misrepresenting see Sanath Nanayakkara, "Abbhakkhana-Its Effective on Buddhism" in *Arcana,* Prof. M.H.F.Jayasuriya Felicition volume, publ. Godage and Brothers, Sri Lanka. 2002, p202.
12. *Majjhimanikāya* I, p 265. "Idha matāpitaro ca sannipāto honti, māta ca utuni hoti, gandhabbo ca paccupaṭṭhito hoti,.
13. See *PTS Pāli English Dictionary*, and also Moniar Williams *Sanskrit – English Dictionary.*
14. *Dīghanikāya* "Mahānidanasutta" "Viññāṇam vā hi Ānanda , mātu-kucchiṃ na okkamissatha, api nu kho nāma-rūpaṃ mātu-kucchismiṃ samucchissathāti… viññāṇam vā hi Ānanda mātu-kucchiṃ okkamitvā vokkamisstha, api nu kho nāma-rūpaṃ itthattāya abhinibbattassathā ti ".

15. For a very detailed and excellent discussion about "Gandhabba" see Vedic "Gandharva" and Pāli "Gandhabba" in O.H. De A Wijesekara, *Buddhist and Vedic Studies, A Miscellany*, Motilal Banarissidass, 1994, P175.

16. *Saṃyuttanikāya* II , p25.

"Katamoca bhikkhave paṭiccasmuppādo, jātipaccayā jarāmaranaṃ, uppadā vā tathāgatānaṃ anuppadā vā , ṭhitā vassa dhātu, dhammaṭṭhititā dhammaniyāmatā, idappaccayatā, taṃ taṃ tathāgato abhisambujjhati, abhisameti.abhisambujjitvā abhisametvā ācikkhanti deseti paññapeti paṭṭhapeti vivarati vibhajati uttāni karoti "

17. *Saṃyuttanikāya* II, p25. "Imasmiṃ sati idhaṃ hoti, imassa uppādā idhaṃ uppajjati, Imasmiṃ asati idhaṃ na hoti,imassa nirodhā idhaṃ nirujjhati"

18. *Mūlamadhyamaka kārikā,* chapter 24, stanza 18.

" Yah pratītyasamutpādah Śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracāksmahe
sā prajñaptirūpādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā"

19. *Mūlamadhyamaka kārikā,* chapter 25, stanza 19.

"Apratītya samuppanno dharmah kascin na vidyate
yasmāt tasmāt aśūnyo hi dharmah kascin na vidyate"

20. *Saṃyuttanikāya,* II, p114.

" Seyathāpi āvuso due nalakalapiyo aññamaññaṃ nissāya tiṭṭheyyaṃ evm kho nāma-rūpapaccayā viññāṇam , viññāṇa paccaya nāmrūpaṃ, salāyatana paccaya phasso phassapaccayā Vedanā Vedanā paccayā taṇhā, taṇhā, paccayā upādānaṃ upādāna paccayā bhavo bhava paccayā jāti jāti paccayā jarā-maraṇaṃ soka-parideva-dukkha –domanasupāyāsā sambhavanti… ..thesaṃca āvuso nalakalāpaṃ ekaṃ ākaḍḍheyya eka papateyya, evamev hko āvso nāmarūpa nirodhā viññāṇa nirodho viññānssa nirodhā nāmarūpanirodho….."

Chapter 4

CŪLASUÑÑATA AND MAHĀ SUÑÑATA SUTTAS PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING DESCENTS IN TO VOIDNESS

4.1.Descent in to Voidness

4.1.1. Mind and influxes

It is clearly stated that the cause of bondage of humans to samsaric existence is Āsava, (influxes) also known by other terms like Kilesa (defilements) Upakkilesa(minor defilements but same as Kilesa), Saṃyojano(=Saññojana) fetters, Bandhana (bonds) and so on. These keep the mind bound to circle of life and death, or samsaric existence. The whole purpose of the path is freeing the mind from these influxes or fetters. Thus, the texts describes how the mind gets freed from these defiling forces when these defilements are seen and identified through wisdoms (Paññāya ca disvā āsavā parickhīṇā honti) The *Dīghanikāya* further explains how wisdom enables one to free his mind from these Āsavas. " The mind (Citta) when thoroughly developed through understanding, is set free from these obsessions namely, the obsessions of sensuality, becoming, views and ignorance.(1)

Affected by these the mind falls sick. (Ātura-citta). It is this sick that causes Dukkha. Dukkha in Pāli is almost synonymous with Loka , meaning the world. Buddhism says that the world is established in Dukkha (Dukkhe loko patiṭṭhito). This is why Buddhism advocates that one has to transcend this world and experience a sort of supra-mundane (Lokuttara) consciousness (Citta). The mind released from āsava is therefore, called the supra mundane-minded (Lokuttara-citta). The realization of such mind is in other words , is the realization of Nibbāna (=Skt, Nirvāṇa) which is often described as Parama sukha (supreme bliss: 'Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ')(2); Nibbāna is also described as Abyādhi (free from disease); (3), Anītika (healthy)(4).

There is a very interesting sutta in which Ven: Sāriputta explains how it is possible to have a healthy mind, in spite of having a sick body . Thus he explains in the "Khandha Saṃyutta" of the *Saṃyuttanikāya:* (5) in addressing a well-known lay householder called Nakulapitā, ven, Sāriputta says:

> ***" And how, householder, is one affected in body is not affected in mind? Here however, the instructed noble disciple, who is a seer of the noble ones and is skilled and disciplined in their Dhamma, who is a seer of superior persons and is skilled and disciplined in their Dhamma, does not regard from as self, or self as in form. He does not live obsessed by the notions: "I am form, form is mine' As he lives unobsessed by these notions that form of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of form, their do not arise in his sorrow, lamentation, pain displeasure, and despair"***

Sāriputta continues to explain similarly with regard to the attitude to be adopted towards feeling (Vedanā), perception (Saññā), mental formation (Saṅkhāra) and consciousness (Viññāṇa) , and concludes

that living in such a way one even though sick in body, can be healthy in mind. This clearly clarifies that soul view (Attavāda/Attānudiṭṭhi) is a primary cause of Dukkha. It is when the mind is afflicted by thus one is in Dukkha; and this is really the sum-total of afflictions (Āsava), for Āsava (=Saṃyojana, kilesa etc) are nothing but manifesting of the selfishness founded on the false belief of a "self". This explains why ordinary people (Puthujjana) are always afflicted both in body and mind, and Arahants, though may be afflicted in body, are not at all afflicted in mind.

4.1.2. Diṭṭhi

The ordinary people are generally inclined to cling to such a belief or a view holding normally, that a soul exists. The "Khandha Saṃyutta" (6)contains a number suttas state this fact. Similarly, "Salāyatana Saṃyutta" (7) also presents a number of such suttas and admonishes those who cling to such a false view to give it up. The Buddha in the *Suttanipāta* (8), in the well known advice to Mogharāja, clearly says: 'Root out the dogmatic views of self; thus one cross over death. (Attānudiṭṭhiṃ ūhacca evaṃ maccutarosiyā).

What should be remembered there is that when the Buddha strongly urged the followers to abandon completely the soul-view, he did not in its place give another view to hang on to. Through out Buddhism what has happened is that except a few insightful teachers like Moggaliputtatissa, Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, many others considered that the Buddha posited a new view to replace the self view, and that new view is Anatta. We have already said that in Buddhism

Anatta is not a view substituted for the Bhrāhmaṇic(and also Śramaṇic) "Atta" view. This cannot be because Buddha considered 'views' as a source of clinging. It is one of the four Āsavās namely, Diṭṭhāsava-clinging to views. Clinging to views is , therefore, a great obstacle to released the mind from Āsava. Views are always based not on seeing and knowing; but on speculative thinking. Therefore, texts like the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* explains views are clinging to ten undeclared questions (Dasa-avyākathāvatthūni) such as whether the world is finite or infinite and so on. Diṭṭhi is the personal, subjective stand point one adopt with regard to what is seen, heard, sensed and cognized. But the Buddha's admonition is to the contrary. Admonishing Bāhiyadārucīriya the Buddha , in the "Boddhivagga" of the *Udāna* says: (9)

> ***" Then Bāhiya you must train yourself thus ; 'In the seen there will be just seen, in the heard, just the heard; in the sensual just the sensed; in the cognized just the cognized. That is how, you must train yourself. Now Bāhiya, when is the seen there will be to you just seen; in the hear .....in the cognized, just the cognized, then Bāhiya you will have no "thereby"; when you have no 'thereby' you will have no "therein" as you Bāhiya, will have no 'therein' it follows that you will have no 'here' or 'beyond' or 'midway between' That is just end of Dukkha".***

This undoubtedly is a very profound piece of advice, in fact bringing out in to our mind the style of discoursing adopted by Ācārya Nāgārjuana , so much of profound ideas so succinctly compressed in to such a few words.

4.1.2. Sikkhitabbaṃ

Primarily the term "Sikkhitabbaṃ" is important. What the Buddha says is that one should "train" oneself. This does not mean to

"adopt a view" but to developed an attitude , an outlook an understanding regarding reality. This outlook should not be based on a self-view. If so it becomes a subjective one, a view is the subjective attitude , attitude dictated by one's likes (Ruci) and dislike (Aruci). If one adopts a subjective attitude,then one's true vision would be distorted, and he will become subject to clinging and thought proliferation (Papañca). This is clearly shown in the "Madhupiṇḍika Sutta" (10) This will make one subject to Dukkha.

4.1.3.Stop-short

Therefore, one has to **'stop-short'**, without allowing oneself to be led astray by one's subjective thinking. The terms "Tena"(thereby) "Tattha" (therein), "Idha" (here), Huraṃ(beyond) and a "Ubhayamantare" (some position between here and beyond) are important. If one's attitude is not self-centered, is not promoted and directed by self-interest, then these kind of considerations will not trouble him, and he will not become a slave to endless thinking about what is seen, heard, sensed and cognized. This is because such a person does not form any "view', and cling to it saying, this alone is true all else is false (Idameva saccaṃ moghamaññaṃ).

4.1.5. Dhamma and Adhamma

As is very well known the Buddha says that not only what is not Dhamma, but even the Dhamma should be abandoned (Dhammameva pahātabbaṃ paggeva adhammā (11). This why the Dhamma is compared to a raft. Thus the Buddha regarding the Dhamma says:

" Bhikkhus I shall show you how the Dhamma is similar to a raft, being for the popular of crossing over not for the purpose of grasping.....suppose a man in the course of a journey saw a great expanse of water, whose near shore was dangerous and fearful and whole further shore was safe and true from fear. But, there was no ferry-boat or bridge going to the far shore. Then he thought:......suppose I collect grass, twigs, branches, and leaves and bind them together in to a raft, and supported by the raft and making an effort with any hands and feet, I got safely across to the far shore,.....And then when he got across to the far shore.... He might think thus : ' This raft has been very helpful to me... suppose I were to carry it on my head or on my shoulder and then go wherever I want".

Thus, the what Buddha point out is that a wrong attitude to not be adopted to the raft, though it had been of great one. Such an attitude merely shows that one has only selfish clinging. Explaining the correct attitude that should be adoted the Buddha says 'the man should drag the raft to dry land or set afloat in the water. This shows that he has not no selfish clinging to it.

4.1.6. Sammādiṭṭhi

Clinging to views-even to right views- is similar . More than the view it is the **clinging** that creates problems. Clinging or Upādāna is the manifestation of selfishness, rooted is self-view. Once one clings ,he holds it dear even at the cost of life, denouncing and condemning everything else. Thus leads to agitation conflict and sorrow. So 'dogmatic' clinging even to Dhamma is a problem, for its obstructs spiritual progress. Dogmatism is an expression of one 's likes, dislikes, one's prejudices . It would lead to disputes. Many suttas

in the *Suttanipāta* such as "Cūlavyuha" and "Mahāvyuha" very effectively bring out this danger of clinging to views.

Sammādiṭṭhi though generally translated in to english as 'right-view', is not a 'view' in the ordinary sense of the word. In a very narrow and ordinary sense it is contrasted with wrong view (Micchā-diṭṭhi). Miccādiṭṭhi a usually explained as hereticle belief. such as non-acceptance of moral values, rebirth, efficacy of deeds and their consequences(i.e. Kamma-vipāka) and so on. In this context Sammā-diṭṭhi is the opposite of these views. But, in a higher sense Sammā-diṭṭhi is the understanding one gets through proper knowledge of the true nature of things. It is not a view constructed according to one's inclinations , one's likes and dislikes, but the vision and knowledge of the reality, how things have come to be . This is what is meant by the Buddha when he advocates the views namely, eternalism (Sassatavāda) and annihilationism(Ucchedavāda), which are both metaphysical, dogmatic views. After asking them to abandon these , the Buddha does not offer them an alternative view. It is very important to understand this fact. For most people seems to be under wrong belief that the Buddha after rejecting these two views offered another , a third view . The Buddha's teaching on the dependent origination is not a third view of reality but an explanation of what reality is, or to be more precise how to view reality. In the "Kaccayānagotta Sutta" the Buddha says that when one sees the arising of things he would give up the annihilationist view, and when one sees the passing away of things ,he would abandon the eternalist view. He describes this teaching as the 'middle teaching'(Majjhena dhamma) not because it take up the

middle position between two extremes This teaching transcends both extremes, and takes up no position , but see the true nature of things. Therefore, the Buddha makes no claim for 'propounding' a view, but only for 'discovering' how things happen. Unlike the other religious teachers of this time the Buddha did not put up a absolutist position regarding the nature of reality, for he very well understood that such an attitude will end up is speculation and dogmatism which are extremes and which would , therefore , not serve any purpose in bringing about an end to Dukkha. Of course, this cannot be said about all later scholars of Buddhist thought. Due to various reasons they were compelled to adopt very dogmatic positions, and maintain them by using logic and reasoning, forgetting that the Buddha advocated 'experience' (12) as the most dependable means of understanding reality. This in fact , as pointed out before, is the reasoning for the rise of Madhyamaka school which severely criticized the new substantial and realist concepts put forward by them. Śūnyatā is the method used by Ācāraya Nāgārjuana to criticize these new interpretations of the Buddha 's teaching.

Early doctrine of Suñña presented by the Buddha also should be taken as a means of criticism adopted by the Buddha to counter the substantialist and realist teachings of his time. This is what the Buddha has been trying to drive in hard to his followers by citing the parable of snake catcher in the "Alagaddūpamasutta". Ācārya Nāgārjuna himself is quoted this very same parable to emphasize the importance of understanding the true significance of the "Śūnyatā' doctrine. The Buddha 's simile of comparing the Dhamma (here Dhamma could

mean Paṭiccasmuppāda because this identification is found in the "Mahāhatthipadopamasutta" of the *Majjhimanikāya* I, 191) to a raft is also for the same purpose . Dhamma should not be considered as the gospel truth, and made an object of worship, it should be made the means of understanding the true nature of things. It is in this sense that later Buddhist scholars have pointed out the Dhamma is not the "truth" itself, it is a 'pointer' to the truth. If Dhamma is taken as the ultimate truth, then it will merely lead astray the one who takes it to be so, and destroy him, just like a snake taken hold of wrongly destroys the snake-catcher. It is with this clear understanding that the teachings on Anatta, Suñña and Paṭiccasamuppāda should be approached . It has been already pointed out that all three concepts are almost co-terminus in meaning, and similar in purpose. They are means or methods of understanding how things have come to be . They should never be regarded as transcendental reality, the only absolute realities that prevails in the word. Such an attitude is totally against the spirit in which the Buddha taught them, and Ācārya Nāgārjuna at subsequent date , tried reemphasize this .

All these three concepts , if they could rightly be called concepts, in the positive aspect connote that everything is inter-related, inter-dependent and, dependently arisen (Paṭiccasamuppanna). In their negative aspect these concepts are presented for the sole purpose of demonstrating that there is nothing substantial. Understanding reality, that there is neither a soul , nor anything connected to a soul, nor even anything called 'own-nature' (Svabhāva) that prevails in all three periods of time, as Sarvāstivādins maintained. Thus Anatta,

Suñña(Śūnya) and Paṭiccasamuppāda (Pratītyasamutpāda) are means or methods to be adopted in getting rid of all views. Highlighting this utilitarian nature of these Ācārya Nāgārjuna says: ***" All sages have declared that śūnyatā is the release from all views. However, if Śūnyatā is a view for anyone, then they are incurables***".(14) The Buddha has already demonstrated that his teachings on Anatta, Suñña and Paṭiccasamuppāda should be practically utilized for this purpose. Beginning from the "Anattalakkhana Sutta" , the Buddha , through a large number of Suttas, have explained how followers should utilize these as means to see and know reality. Among these many suttas , two stand out prominent . These are "Cūla-suññata Sutta"(Sutta no,121) and "Mahā-suññatasutta "(Sutta no 122) of the *Majjhimanikāya.* Both these contains practical guidance and, hence, the special focus on them is this thesis.

4.2. Cūla-Suññatasutta

4.2.1. Abide in voidness.

Firstly, about the "Cūla-suññatasutta". This was preached when the Buddha was residing at Sāvatthi, in the Eastern Park (Pubbārāma) in the mansion of Migāra's mother. (Migāramātā). This was preached by the Buddha in response to a question raised by ven; Ānanda. He approaches the Buddha and says: " Venerable sir, on one occasion The Fortunate One was living in the Sākyan country at a town named Nāgaraka. There venerable sir, I heard and learned from The Fortunate One's lips: ***"Now Ānanda , I often abide in voidness" Did I hear that correctly remember that correctly?"***. There is something

interesting in this Venerable Ānanda is not sure as to whether he heard and learned what the Buddha said correctly. What the Buddha said was he often **abide in voidness**. In Pāli it read as " Suññatavihārenāhaṃ Ānanda etarahi bahūlaṃ viharāmī'ti"

The key term is "Suññatavihāra" and venerable Ānanda, as it is made known from his quarry seems to have been not quite familiar with this .Otherwise, there would not have been a need to recheck about his hearing and learning what the Buddha said. Not only that, there is also a nild sense of curiosity in venerable Ānanda's quarry. Had the Buddha just said he often spend his time in quietude and solitude , venerable Ānanda, would not have been so intrigued.

Does this therefore, mean that this sort of abiding in voidness (Suññatavihāra) was not a common practice?. But then , the Buddha says that he "often"(the Pāli term used to indicate this is "**Bahūlaṃ**", which also means very much) entered in to this abiding) . If the Buddha often engaged in this practice, how was it that his personal attendant was not quite aware of it?.

The conjuncture possible is that there is no outward characteristics or sign by which one could discern what kind of meditative practice the Buddha was engage in when he spent time in solitude very often. This is , often, so with most methods of meditation. So, while, it is possible to understand venerable Ānanda's non-awareness of the particular meditative practice the Buddha was indulged in, it is not quite clear why he was rather not "sure" about what he heard regarding this ,it may be the "uncommonness" of the designation "Suññatavihāra" applied to this particular practices. The

term "Suñña", as it has been already pointed out ,was not commonly used . The commoner term was Anatta. The whole sutta namely, "Cūlasuññata Sutta" is a method, or a sutta containing guideline regarding the voidness of everything. It directs how to make mind withdraw from all kinds of disturbances , and focus it in the present, and then try to understand the true nature of things. The Buddha adopts a very practical style in explaining the whole process of the practice.

After affirming ven. Ānanda that he had understood and remembered correctly what the Buddha had said earlier, the Buddha immediately begins to explain the process of the practice. He says:

> ***"Ānanda, just as this palace of Migāra's mother is void of elephants, cattle, horses, mares, void of bold and silver, void of assembly of men and women, there is present only this non-voidness, namely, the unit dependant on the assembly of Bhikkhu ; so to , a Bhikkhu not attending to the perception of village, not attending to the perception of people- attends only to unit dependent on this perception of the forest. His mind then enters into that perception of the forest and acquires confidence, steadiness and decision . He understand thus: 'what ever disturbances of the village, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of people, those who are not present here. There is present only this amount of disturbance, namely, the unit dependent on the perception of forest . He understand : This field of perception is void of perception of the village; this field perception is void of perception of people; There is present only this non-voidness, namely, the unit dependent on the perception of the forest' Thus he regards it as void of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: 'This is present'. Thus Ānanda this is genuine, undistorted pure descent into voidness".(15)***

4.2.2. Practical process of Viññāṇa

From the instruction regarding the descent in to voidness (Suññatāvatāra) it is clear that what meant is to gradually flush out from the consciousness all distracting thoughts and bring the mind to be concerned about the reality that prevails in the present. As we know, in the Buddha 's analysis of the problem of Dukkha he pays special attention to the distortion of perception , and emphasize the need to straighten it. This is very clearly demonstrated in the "Madhupiṇḍika Sutta" of the *Majjhimanikāya* (16) . It shows how , when one allows perception to take its own course, it involves one in thought proliferation (Papañca), making one a hopless slave of it. This is because perception is not properly guided, regulated and controlled . It is this very same admonition that is contained in the advice offered to Bāhiyadārucīriya in the *Udāna*. All these very emphatically point out that , in order to get out of this mass of Dukkha (Dukkhakandha) one has to necessarily straightened his view. "Cūla-suññata Sutta" presents the practical process that one should follow in doing this . This is intended as a training in properly guiding perception ,without allowing perception to go astray among objects that are not even presents. Because this would happen through associated awareness. The normal tendency of the consciousness is to roam about, renewing links with the past and building bridges to the future. This sutta admonishes one to focus one's consciousness as the present object only, and to do that with full awareness .

The Sutta continues how this regulating of the consciousness should be gradually led in to more profound states. From the forest as

the object, the Sutta admonishes that the consciousness should be set on earth, which is a more concrete "unit" (Ekatte). Thus, object being static and more unitary, helps concentration of consciousness. (17) The process appeals to be same as thus the one followed in Jhānas, though the purpose is different here. This is a deeper descent in to voidness. In this manner one is asked to go on step by step fixing his consciousness as infinite apace (Ākāsānañcāyatanasaññāṃ), from thence to infinite consciousness (Viññāṇañcāyatanasaññāṃ), from that to the base of nothingness (Ākiñcaññātanasaññāṃ), then to the base of neither-perception nor-non-perception (Nevasaññānāsaññāyataṃsaññāṃ).

4.2.3. Animitta ceto samādhi.

Through this process of gradual descent of consciousness to more and more subtler spheres , the practitioner begins to become aware of the voidness of what is not there , and with regard what remains he understands that which is present thus: " This is present. 'Thus, his vision becomes place the gradual weaning of all kind of stray thoughts. When the consciousness is so regulated and directed it becomes possible to attend on the "unit" (Ekattaṃ) dependent on signless concentration of mind (Animitta-cetovimutti). This last mentioned state of concentration of the consciousness is very important. Unlike other concentrations mentioned before, which were all fixed on the "signless" (Animitta). It is on this 'fixity' of the consciousness (Viññāṇatthiti) that the ego-consciousness gets a foothold. But as the Animitta –cetosamādhi or the signless

concentration of the mind the ego begins to dissolve and gradually melt away , for there is no object for it to get a foothold.

Such type of profound and subtle consciousness is referred a unbear of times in the *Dhammapada* explaining the indefinable nature of the consciousness of one who has attained this kind concentration says: " ***To whom there are no accumulations who have comprehended the nutriments , and whose, range is the deliverance of the 'void' and 'signless' .their track is hard to trace like that of the birds in the sky"(18).*** This shows that when one's mind is focused on to the 'signless' (Animitta) there is nothing for the consciousness to take a foothold , for there is no identification of the object of concentration and the consciousness. Explaining this Samadhi the commentary says that , this is a concentration of the mind in insight. It is called 'signless' (Animitta) because it is devoid (Suñña) of the signs (Nimitta) of permanence etc. Therefore, one who realizes through this concentration on Suññata is freed, and his gati (faring) cannot be known. This is because this consciousness is not established on any object as there is no 'object' in his concentration. His mind is fixed on the 'voidness' of everything. The stae of such person , his "tractlessness" is mentioned in several stanzas in the *Dhammapada* . Thus , stanza says: ***" He whose corruptions are destroyed , he who is not attached to foot, he who has deliverance which is void and signless, as his object- his path like that of birds in the air , cannot be traced"(19).***

Thus, this Animitta-cetosamādhi leads to animitta Cetovimokkho- the signless liberation of the mind . But this Samādhi

itself is not 'liberation' (Vimokkha) . Unlike with regard to the previous attainments which had some sort of an object to "fix" the consciousness on , in this there is no such object. The object is " Suññata" (voidness) itself. By applying his insight (Vipassanā) the meditator understand this state of consciousness as follows: ***"This signless concentration of the mind is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent , subject to cessation".(20)***

4.2.4. Abhisaṅkhata

The two terms 'Abhisaṅkhata' and 'Abhisañcetayita' are very important. These means 'constructed', 'mentally constructed'. Our whole perception is constructed (Abhisaṅkhata). We build on construct on everything that comes within the range of our perceptions. This construction is done according to our likes and dislikes (Ruci-aruci) and, therefore, what we construct is subjective and far away from reality. Therefore, what is required is a process to straighten our view and understand how things have come to be (Yathābhūta-ñāṇa). This is where the genuine descent into voidness becomes most essential. When a practitioner understand that even the Animitta-cetovimutti is mentally conditioned and volitionally produced one really descent into true un perverted ,pure voidness (Evamassa,Ānanda yāthabhuccā avipallatthā parisuddhā paramanuttarā suññavakkhanti) This understanding is brought about by gradual experience and not through any other means, that is speculations, logic, reasoning etc. If it is produced by such means it would really be unperverted (Vipallattha)

one. But this is purely as personal experience and, hence ,can be specifically qualified as un perverted (Avipallattha).

When the practitioner realize the true nature of things, that is when he fully well realize that what he has been holding as reality is what is constructed and volitionally produced and that all such mentally constructed and volitionally produced things are impermanent and subject to cessation , he realize the true nature of things, how thing have came to be , that all things are void of any 'fixity' ,'entity', 'substance', that everything is void, and relative to other things.

The Sutta says that when the practitioner knows and sees (Evaṃ jānato evaṃ passato), his mind is liberated from defilements of sensual desire (Kāmāsava), defilements of ignorance (Avijjāsava). When it is liberated there is the knowledge . It is liberated (Vimuttasmin vimuttamiti ñāṇaṃ hoti). From this it is very clear what the early Buddhist concept adopted towards it is. It was never regarded as another concept of as the Absolute Truth. Suññata, to the early Buddhists ,was the true nature of reality, not something mentally constructed or volitionally produced. The purpose of this Sutta is to give practical advice to lead the mind to descent into this stats and experience the voidness of everything.

4.3. Mahā-Suññatasutta

4.3.1. Mental aloofness

There is an equally important sutta on the same subject. This the "Mahā-suññatasutta" (no.122)also of the *Majjhimanikāya* . This

sutta offers more practical instruction regarding how Suññata should be understood. Starting by emphasizing the importance of attuning the mind to this practice, the initial admonition is to seek solitude that would provide the necessary mental environment to begin the practice. It does not really mean physical aloofness , but mental aloofness , even though being physically present in company. Thus the Buddha says:

" Ānanda, a Bhikkhu does not shine by delighting in company, by taking delight in company, by devoting himself to delight in company; by delighting in society, is taking delight in society, by rejoicing in society. Indeed Ānanda, it is not possible that a Bhikkhu who delights in company, takes delight in company, and devotes himself to delight in company and rejoice in society , will ever obtain at will, without trouble or difficulty the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of peace , the bliss of enlightenment. But it can be expected that when a Bhikkhu lives alone , withdrawn from a society ,he will obtain at will, without trouble or difficulty, the bliss of renunciation ,the bliss of seclusion , the bliss of peace the bliss of enlightenment"(21).

The Buddha says this seclusion is a very important pre-requisite to this realization. Therefore, he emphasize that it is not possible that a Bhikkhu who delights in company etc will ever enter the mind that is temporary and pleasurable or in the deliverance of the mind that is perpetual and unshakable. (22)

What is emphasized is that such a Bhikkhu is cable of neither obtaining temporary release through Jhānic attainments or final deliverance through attainments of path and fruits This shows how importance this preparation of the mind by making it become aloof from attainment to society, company etc, in order to realize the voidness of everything. Then the Buddha explains how attachment to some objects causes sorrow . He says: ***"I do not see even a single kind***

of form , Ānanda, from the change and alteration of which there would not arise sorrow, lamentation , pain, grief, and despair' in one who lusts for it and takes delight in it'.(23) As it is concerned with voidness , Rūpa is specifically focused upon, for it is Rūpa that mainly that gives rise to a belief is an entity, a substance. So the Buddha, in order to finally lead to the understanding of voidness ,takes Rūpa (form) as the focal point. The Buddha also makes it clear that in order to obtain this understanding what is required is not mere physical aloofness, but the mental aloofness, for the Buddha explains that while being in company of Bhikkūs, Bhikkhunīs , kings etc, he himself remains with a mind inclining to seclusion , a mind that is withdrawn. His mind is in such a state that he invariably and completely dismisses them after talking to them without any hankering after them. He does not get mentally attached to them, for mental attachment springs from the lack of understanding of the true nature of form, that is that form is subject to change and alteration that becomes the fairs of taints (Āsava) . Thus the Buddha explains his discovery of this effective method leading to the understanding of the voidness of things. He says: ***"However, Ānanda, there is this abiding discovered by the Tathādata , to enter and abide in voidness internally by giving no attention to all signs'(24).*** It is important because he says it is the Tathāgata who discovered it.

4.3.2. Internal voidness

Further explaining the process of the practice to be followed the Buddha says:

" Therefore, Ānanda, if a Bhikkhu should wish; 'may I enter upon and abide in voidness internally' he should steady his mind internally, quite it, bring it to signlessness, and concentrate it,' And how does he steady his mind internally, quite it, bring it to signlessness, and concentrate it?" (25)

The Buddha gives the practice of four Jhānas as the method of bringing the mind up to the required level of concentration and steadiness to direct it to voidness. He explains that after abiding in the fourth Jhāna he should direct attention to voidness internally (Ajjhattaṃ Suññaṃ). That is to realize the 'essencelessness' internally , if he fails to realize it, he should to aware of it , and then try to direct his mind to understand the voidness externally. If he fails in this too he has to steady his mind by further giving attention to imperturbability. After that he should continue the process again. When he succeeds in entering into imperturbability and steadying his mind, he should regulate it in whatever posture he is and make his mind aloof from all evil unwholesome states (Pāpaka akusalā dhammā). While talking he should train to avoid all unbeneficial talk leading to enchantment (Anatthasaṃhitā……na virāgāya…..saṃṃvattati). If his mind is engaged in thinking, he should avoid all low vulgar, etc, thoughts (Hīnā gammā pothujjanikā…) and resolve to cultivate ennobling, emancipating thoughts.

Then he should review his own mind and examine whether his mind is yet involved in any excitement concerning the five sensual pleasures. If he that finds such involvements are not yet abandoned, he should strive to abandon them. It is thus that he should contemplate on

the true nature of the five aggregates . The Buddha explaining how to do this says:

" Ananda, there are these five aggregates affected by clinging , in regard to which a Bhikkhu should abide contemplating rise and fall thus: such is material form, such its arising, such its disappearance; such is feeling…..perception;….consciousness such is its arising such its disappearance"(26).

The Buddha explains that when one abide contemplating on rise and fall in these five aggregates affected by clinging , the conceit 'I am' based on these, is abandoned.(27) The knowledge that this conceit 'I am' is rooted in the soul view . By descending deep in to voidness , one is able to get over this conceit . 'I am', being rooted in the self view leads to such views as 'This is mine' (Etam me) , 'This I am'(Eso ahaṃ asmi), 'This is myself'(Eso mama attā). It is from this that craving (Taṇhā,) develops. Thus, it is seen that conceit (Asmimāna) , views (Diṭṭhi) and craving (Taṇhā,) are all different manifestation of the self-view. It is these that lead to thought proliferation (Papañca) making one a hopeless object of its relief less assaults involving not only present but also what is past and future. This shows why the Buddha gives so much emphasis to view the whole world as being 'void'(Suñña).

4.3.3. Cetovimutti

The terms Cetovimutti (deliverance of mind) is noteworthy. The crux of the Buddhist analysis of Dukkha is that it is our mental involvement with the five aggregates of clinging (Pañcūpādānakhandhā) that makes us subject to Dukkha. Our

inposition of an 'ego' on the five aggregates leads us to believe in an entity , which give rise to craving , views , conceit (Taṇhā, -diṭṭhi-māna) and all kinds of selfishness. To liberate ourselves ,we have to liberate the mind. Suttas such as the "Mahāvedalla" of the *Majjhimanikāya* speaks of four kinds of such deliverance of the mind.

Those are :

1. immeasurable deliverance of the mind (Appamānacetovimutti);
2. Deliverance of the mind through nothingness (Ākiñcaññāyatana cetovimutti);
3. Deliverance of the mind through voidness (Suññata cetovimutti) and
4. Signless deliverance (Animitta cetovimutti).(28)

The "Mahāvedalla Sutta" explaining the relationship of these four Cetovimutti says: ***" There is a way in which those states are different in purpose and different in name".*** Of course, if it is not difficult to understand the differences in name , the name varing according to the focal object of concentration. They are different in purpose , perhaps because some of them , the concentration on the four immeasurables (Brahmavihāra), on the sphere of nothingness (Ākiñcaññāyatana) etc, can be practiced, if one wants, for mundane purposes. In this , they are different. Perhaps, this differences in purpose may to explained in this manner. However, if these cetovimuttis are practiced at the supra mundane (Akuppacetovimutti) it is the best. All four refer to the fruition attainment of Arahatship and hence, they are of one purpose. The Commentary says that all four

namely Appamāna, Ākiñcañña, Suññata, and Animitta are all names for Nibbāna and hence they are one in purpose, the purpose of attaining Nibbāna.

What is exceptional with Suññata concentration is that it directly takes one to the crux of the problems, and quite effectively helps to deconstruct all imaginary mental construction regarding a self, a substance, an entity which is the root come of Dukkha. It helps one to stop-short of getting involved in speculative thinking along the live of data provided through sensory data gets coloured by our likes and dislikes and hence, they take us further away from reality. So, thinking in terms of sensory data, which in Pāli is called 'Maññanā', means to be misled. This kind of 'thinking' make us attribute permanency to what is impermanent, happiness to what is producing unhappiness, and substance to what does not have substance.

4.3.4. Maññanā

'Maññanā' is self-centered egoistic mode of thinking. Such thinking distorts our vision of life, vision of about ourselves and the world we live in. The understanding of Suññata opens up a new straight forward , correct , vision. As Suññata is same as 'Anatta' and Paṭiccasamuppāda, it helps the practitioner to develop a correct view of life, and free oneself from his Dukkha. In such person all taints (Āsava) are destroyed. Though he acts and takes like an ordinary person, he is truly emancipated, for he is endowed with an undistorted , vision of reality.

End notes

1. *Dīghanikāya* , II, p81. "Paññāparibhāvitaṃ cittaṃ sammadeva āsavehi vimuccati seyyathīdaṃ kamāsava, bhavāsava, diṭṭhāsava,"
2. *Dhammapada,* stanza, no; 204. "Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ"
3. *Majjhimanikāya,* I, p173.
4. *Saṃyuttanikāya,* IV, p371.
5. *Saṃyuttanikāya* III, p46.
6. *Saṃyuttanikāya,* III Khandasamyutta, p 18
7. *Saṃyuttanikāya,* IV, p148.
8. *Suttanipāta,* stanza, no: 1119.
9. *Udāna,* "Bodhivagga", "Bāhiyadārucīriyasutta"

"Tasmātiha, Bāhiya, evaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ: diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati; sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati; mute muta mattaṃ bhavissati; viññāte viññāta mattaṃ bhavissati. Evamhi te Bodhiyā sikkhitabbaṃ Yo kho Bāhiya diṭṭhe…sute…mute…viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissati tato tvaṃ Bāhiya na tena, yato tvaṃ Bāhiya nate na ,tato tvaṃ Bāhiya na tattha; yato tvaṃ Bāhiya, na tatta, tato tvaṃ Bāhiya n'eva idha, na huraṃ na ubhayamantare, esevanto dukkhassati."

10. *Majjhimanikāya,* I, p111.
11. *Majjhimanikāya,* II, p134.
12. *Majjhimanikāya,* "Saṅgāravasutta".
13. *Majjhimanikāya,* I, p191.
14. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā,* chapter13,stanza 8.

" Śūnyatā sarva drṣtinām-proktā nissaraṇaṃ jinaiḥ
Yesāṃtu śūnyatā drṣṭiḥ-tanasādhyaṃ babāsire".

15. *Majjhimanikāya,* sutta, no, 121.

"Seyyathā pi ayaṃ Migāramātupāsādo suñño hatthigavassavalavena, suñño jātarūarajatena, suññaṃ itthipūrisasannipātena; atthi c'ev' idaṃ asuññataṃ yadidaṃ Bhikkhusaṅghaṃ paṭicca ekattaṃ; evaṃ eva kho Ānanda, Bhikkhu, amanasikaritvā gāmasuññaṃ amanasikaritvā manasssaññāṃ araññasaññāṃ paṭicca manasikaroti ekatta…… suññatāvakkhanti bhavanti"

16. *Majjhimanikāya,* Sutta no: 18.

17. *Majjhimanikāya,* Sutta no : 121.

"Punaca paraṃ Ānanda, amanasikaritvā manussasaññāṃ amanasikaritvā arañña saññāṃ paṭhavi saññāṃ paṭicca manasi karoti ekattaṃ".

18. *Dhammapada,* Stanza, 92. "Yesaṃ sannicayonatthi- ye pariññāta bhojano Suññato animitto ca- vimokkho yassa gocaro Ākāseva sakuṇtānaṃ- gati tesaṃ durannayo"
19. *Dhammapada,* Stanza, 93.

"Yassāsava parikkhinā – āhāre ca anissito
suññato animitto ca – vimokkho yassa gocaro
ākāse'va sakuṇtānaṃ- padaṃ tassa durannayaṃ"

20. *Majjhimanikāya,* Sutta no. 121.

"So evaṃ pajānāti. Ayampi kho animitto cetosamādhi abhisaṅkhato abhisañcetayito. Yaṃ kho pana kiñci abhisaṅkhataṃ abhisañcitayitaṃ tad aniccaṃ nirodha dhammaṃ ti pajānāti".

21. *Majjhimanikāya,* Sutta no: 122.

"Na kho Ānanda, Bhikkhu sobhani saṅganikārmo saṅganikrato saṅganikamatao anuyutto ganāramo ganarato ganasammudito…….

22. *Majjhimanikāya,* Sutta no: 122.

"Sovat'Ānanda, Bhikkhu saṅganikārāmo saṅganikārāmato anuyutto ...cetovimuttiṃ upasampajja viharissati.

23. *Majjhimanikāya,* Sutta, no: 122.

"Nāhaṃ, Ananda, ekarūpampi samanupassāmi:…… yatthābhirattassa rūpassa viparināmaññatthabhāva na uppajjeyyuṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupaysa."

24. *Majjhimanikāya,* Sutta, No: 122.

"Ayaṃ kho Ānanda, vihāro tathāgatena abhisambuddho, yadidaṃ sabbanimittānaṃ amanasikārā ajjhattaṃ Suññataṃ upasampajja viharituṃ"

25. *Majjhimanikāya,* Sutta no : 122.

"Tasmātiha Ānanda, Bhikkhu ce pi akaṅkheyya: ajjhattaṃ suññataṃ upasampajja vihareyyanti. Ten'Ānanda, Bhikkhunā ajjhattamevaṃ cittaṃ santhapetabbaṃ, sannisaditabbaṃ, ekodi kātabbaṃ, samādahatabbaṃ."

26. *Majjhimanikāya,* Sutta, no: 122.

"Pañca kho ime Ānanda, upādanakkhandhā, yatthā Bhikkhunā udayabbyānupassana vihātabbaṃ. Iti rūpaṃ iti rūpassa samudayo.

27. *Majjhimanikāya,* Sutta, no;122.

Tassa imesu pañcasupādānakkhandhesu udayabbayanupassino viharato, yo pañcasupādānakkhandhesu asmimāno, so pahīyati.

28. *Majjhimanikāya,* "Mahāvedallasutta."

CHAPTER 5.

SUÑÑA IN POST- CANONICAL TEXTS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BUDDHAGHOSA AND HIS VISUDDHIMAGGA.

5.1 Post-Canonical Texts

5.1.1. Sabba

The previous chapters, it is hoped, clearly established the fact that Suñña/ Suññata concept is , by no means, new to Buddhism. Ample evidence was given to show that the *Nikāyas* used this term in the sense of empty/emptiness. This meant the emptiness of everything of a soul or anything connected to a soul (Suñño attena vā attanīyena vā). In such instances everything referred "all" (Sabba) that is subject to dependent origination. Everything, that is "sabba" in Pāli, meant all sense organs and sense-objects. This is another word for whole world. All that comes within the sensory range or even extra-sensory perceptive (Abhiññā/ Abhijña) range are empty of anything substantial. This is the early Buddhist view. The *Dhammapada* makes a fine distinction in this regard. Thus the *Dhammapada* stanza no; 277-279 read as follows.

"Impermanent are all conditional things.
When one sees this wisdom
One get disgusted with all that is suffering (Dukkha).
This is path to purity"

" Suffering are all conditioned things.
When one sees this with wisdom,
One gets disgusted with suffering.
This is the path to purity."

" All things (Dhamma) are without a soul.
When one sees this with wisdoms,
Then one gets disgusted with suffering.
This is the path to purity." (1).

In this the first two stanzas use the word **"Saṅhkārā"** to mean "things". Saṅkhāra or Saṅkhtata is usually used to mean what is conditioned. That whatever is conditioned is impermanent the most fundamental teaching of Buddha. As pointed out already whatever that is conditioned is impermanent and whatever that is impermanent is non-satisfactory or suffering (Sabbe saṅhkārā aniccā, yadaniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ). The early Buddhist teaching on the true nature of things goes still further. This is seen by the substitution of the word **Saṅkhārā** (conditioned/ compounded), by the word **Dhamma**, a term very wide in meaning applicable to all "conditioned" (sankhata) as well as "unconditioned" (Asaṅkhata) things. When it is says that "Sabbe Dhamma anatta" it means that not only the conditioned things (Saṅkhata dhamma, saṃskṛta dharma) but also things unconditioned. This means that every things including the unconditioned (=Nibbāna) is empty; for Nibbāna is defined in Buddhism as Asaṅkhata/asamskṛta.

Thus, it is seen that clearly Buddhism applied the word "Anatta" to cover everything, and it meant that everything is empty, empty of a soul, empty of any substance. As the last line, the refrain in all three stanzas, indicate the knowledge, the perfect understanding of this fact, is the path to purity. Purity (Visuddhi) here is same as freedom , release (Vimutti) from Dukkha, which is the goal, the **Summum bonum**, the highest-goal , of Nibbāna. Thus the understanding that everything is "void' in the way to Nibbāna.

As we have noted already in subsequent to Buddhist thought the term "Anatta" was supplemented or even substituted by the word Śūnya / Śūnyatā. This was done in order to dispel some misinterpretation that were prevalent regarding the Buddha 's teaching on "Anicca" or impermanency . To be precise, early Mahāyāna texts such as the Prajñāpāramitādasasahasrikā etc, first began to popularize the term Suñña and substituted the term Anatta (=Sanskrit, Anātma)by it. Thus was to counter the Sarvāstivāda teaching of tri-temporal existence of all thing (Sarva dharma).

5.1.2. *Kathāvatthu.*

Scholars have clearly pointed out that this conflict between the orthodox school (Vibhajjavāda) that is those who held that things exists only in the present, and the unorthodox school (Sarvāstivāda) which held that all dharmas (things) exists is all three periods of time (Sarvaṃ sarvadā asti) was the main cause that led to the third Buddhist council(2). It was at this time Ven. Moggaliputtatissa completed the classic work called the *Kathāvatthu*. Though compiled in the third

century B.C. the text is considered so important, that is given canonical status and included in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. The main purpose of the *Kathāwatthu* is to refute the views which the Theravādins, also called Vibhajjavādins, considered as misrepresentations of the Buddha 's teaching. In doing so, it attempts to reject those and establish the orthodox Theravāda position. Thus text discusses in all about 217 such controversial issues. It starts that with the Puggalavāda. This is an attempt to refute the Puggalavāda (persionality view) put forward by the Puggalavadins, sometimes also called Vātsīputra-sammitiyas, who held the existence of a continuing "person"(pudgala) besides the five aggregates.

The *Kathāvatthu* also criticizes teachings of such schools as Mahāsaṅghika, Sammitiya, Andhaka Sarvāstivāda etc. But even at this time one does not find the common use of the term Suñña in refuting any kind of substantialist views. This seen even when criticizing the Sarvastvāda teaching of tri-temporal existence of all things. (see the "Sabbatthi-kathā" in the *Kathāvatthu*). However, these two terms Suñña /Suññata is found to be used sparingly in explaining perception. This is seen from such chapter as "Pancaviññṇā asamasigissa magga kathā" and "Pañcaviññāṇaṇa-kusalākusalampi ti kathā". What could be inferred from this is that the Theravadins did not feel the necessity of using another term to denote the idea of non-substantiality, for the term "Anatta" had by then become so widely accepted.

5.1.3 Paṭisambhidāmagga and Milindapañha

But, in subsequent texts such as the *Paṭisambhidamagga* and the *Milindhapañha*, containing the well known debate between Nāgasena and Menander, which belongs to a still later (this book is known in its Chinese version as the Nāgesenabhiksu Sūtra) use the term more frequently. In fact the ***Paṭisambhidāmagga*, besides dealing with such meditative practices as Suññatavihāra, Suññatavihāra samāpatti, Suññato vimokkha, refers to twenty-five different modes of Suññata. (see chapter one of this book).**

What this suggests is that as time passed due to the development of other schools and various religious debates, it became necessary to search for new terminology to counter these new substantialist-interpretations of the Buddha's fundamental teaching on impermanency (Aniccatā). It appears that it is the Mahāyānists who made the term Śūnya / Śūnyatā become more popular as a technical term, and the Theravadinds too, could not remain without adopting it more frequently. This is why the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* refers to twenty-five different modes of Suñña, a feature not found in early texts. Even the ***Milindapañha*, when explaining Anatta , uses term Suñña. Thus explaining the non-substantiality of Nāma-rūpa (mind and matter) it says: " Nāma Rūpa is void, soulless and motionless"** (Nāma rūpam pi suññaṃ nijjīvaṃ nirīhakaṃ).

This is found exactly repeated in the *Visuddhimagga.* The Theravāda tradition thus maintain through out the early meaning of Suñña, that is that Suñña means empty of a soul **(Nijjīva)**. Soul is the concept of permanency. Having a soul the Buddhist point of view,

means having permanency. Therefore, to emphasize this impermanency (Aniccatā) of all phenomena, early Buddhism consistently stressed the absence of a 'soul" (Atta). Anatta is the early term, and in later texts , another term "Nijjīva" (Nir+jīva, 'Nir' meaning without and 'Jīva' means the soul) has been used. However, both these term are synonymous.

Though, this is the dominant view that is found in the Post-Canonical Pāli Buddhist literature, there is no doubt that scholars of this period were influenced by the developments taking place in later Buddhist thought such as Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika. Theravāda Buddhism, the form Buddhism that is widely prevalent in South East Aria, could not remain totally independent of these new developments. As pointed out before, Moggaliputtatissa Mahāthera by compiling his **Magnum opus,** the *Kathāvatthu*, attempted to cleanse Buddhism of these influences of the Buddha's teaching. But subsequently, these later views gradually seeped in to Buddhism. This greatly happened through the works of venerable Buddhaghosa himself.

Venerable Buddhaghosa whose name literally means 'the voice of Buddha' was a Brahmin of India. Some says he is from the north, close to Buddhagaya, whereas others consider him to be from south. His connection with the south is very clear, and it is certain that, at least, at a later stage of his life he had close connections with the south converted to Buddhism, he later came to Sri Lanka for the expressed purpose of translating in to Pāli language, the commentaries to canonical texts that were in the Sinhala language. He came to Sri Lanka in the 5th century A.D , and it is said that the Mahāvihāra

monks of Sri Lanka wanted to test his ability to undertake such a stupendous task. They gave him two stanzas from the *Saṃyuttanikāya.* Though a work of a later scholar-monk it enjoys almost canonical status in all Southeast Asian Buddhist countries. Ven: Buddhaghosa's ability and his contribution to Buddhist thought is immense. But about his originality and his adherence to the spirit of early Buddhist teaching are being differently evaluated. For a example, Rhys Davids writes: ***" Of his talent there can be no doubt , it was equaled only by his extra ordinary industry. But of originality, of independent thought, there is at present, no evidence"(3)***. Another very renowned modern scholar monk Venerable Bhikkhu Ñāṇmoli has this to say about Buddhaghosa.

> ***"Modern critics have reproached him with lack of originality ; but if we are to judge by his declared aims, originality, or to use his own , phrase, 'advertising his own point', seems likely to have been one of the things he would have wished to avoid" (4).***

What is meant by this comment is that ven: Buddhaghosa tried to be objective as far as possible, without giving his own views. This however, does not mean that Buddhaghosa did not present his own views in his writings: He often presents, them openly, declaring them to be his own views (Ayaṃ pana attano mati, which mean, this is my personal view). In many such instances it is clearly seen that he has been greatly influenced by later developments in Buddhist thought and through his works these views seeped in to Buddhism.

5.2. Buddhaghosa

Visuddhimagga in his most famous work and this is taken as the most authoritative work on Buddhism by all south east Asian

Buddhists. A modern scholar David J Kalupahana has written, with evidence to show that ven: Buddhaghosa' s *Visuddhimagga* contains a fair amount of realist and substantialist influence , thus bringing in the influence of Soutrāntika and Sarvāstivāda thought to Buddhism. However, though he may have been acquainted with Madhyamaka thought, he does not seem show any sign of his inclination to agree with it. This perhaps may be because that Nāgārjuna, by the time of ven: Buddhaghosa may have been viewed as an avowed Mahāyānist, and hence , not a proper interpreter of the early Buddhist teaching (5).

5.2.1. *Visuddhimagga*

That Buddhaghosa was influenced by Sarvāstivāda is quite clear: A main teaching of the Sarvāstivādin is about the "Svabhāva" of Dharmas or elements. They maintained that all dharmas have two aspects the "Kāritra"(the active or operational aspect) and "Svabhāva"(the own nature or self nature). This "Svabhāva" of Dharma is said to persist in all three periods of time, past present and future. It is not coming within our empirical knowledge. Therefore, the Sarvāstivāda idea of 'Svabhāva' is a metaphysical concept. They explained that when the Dharmas come to present they manifest themselves, and this present- manifestation is impermanent and subject to change; this is only a phenomenal feature of Dharma. According to them essence of Dharmas is their 'Svabhāva', and this is the 'noumenon', the ultimate reality behind the phenomenon. This 'Svabhāva', being the essence , remain through out . This gave rise to 'Svabhāva' theory (Svabhāvavāda). This interpretation of Dharmas

was felt in Theravāda Buddhism and it was introduced to Theravāda Buddhism by Buddhaghosa ,through his commentaries.

It is Buddhaghosa who introduced this term 'Svabhāva' , the Pāli parallel of Sanskrit 'Svabhāva' in to Theravāda Buddhism. These two terms Dhamma and Svabhāva are used almost as synonymous in Commentarial literature. The commentaries (as example: commentary to *Dhammasaṅgani* namely *Atthasālini*', p126; commentary to *Mahāniddesa*, p 261 use this term and define Dhamma as they are called Dhammas because they bear their own-nature (Attano sabhāvaṃ dharenti'ti dhammā). This interpretation of Dhamma directly go against the Paṭisambbhidāmagga (a canonical text included in the *Kuddhakanikāya*) explaining of Pañcakkhandha. Therein (Paṭisambhidāmagga, II, p211) it is said that the five aggregates (Pañcakkhandha) are void of any own-nature (Attano eva bhāvo etasmin natthīti sabhāvena suññaṃ). Thus, *Paṭisambhidāmagga* clearly rejects the concept of 'Svabhāva'. This clearly means that the Dharmas, which are not different from Pañcakkhandha, are also void of any Svabhāva. The commentators were clearly aware of this position. So, they had to adjust their earlier definitions. To do this they put forward another definition which almost rejected the earlier definition which said that the Dhammas are so called because they bear their own nature. This second definition says , the Dhammas are not which bear their own nature, but which are borne by their own conditions. (Paccayehi dhārayantīti dhammā).

5.3.2. Further definitions

This is very interesting. The earlier definition presented the dhammas as agents (Kattu) , that what bear their own nature (Svabhāva), thus attributing an active role to them . the second definition turns dhammas in to object because this second definition says that they are being born by condition (Paccayehi dharayantiti dhammā). In keeping with this change of roles of Dhammas , from agent to object, a new definition is presented. This says that there are no other things called Dhammas than the "quality" of being born by conditions. (Na dhāriyamāna sabhavena añño dhammo nāma atthi) **Here 'Sabhāva' is used not in the sense of own-nature, but 'quality'(6). In explaining this it is further added that it is like saying that , there is no rūpa (form) that is separate from the quality of disintergration (Ruppana) no hardness (Kakkhalatta) besides the element of earth and so on. (7).**

Thus it says that "Svabhāva" and Dhamma are not two separate things, but it has been shown as two separate things merely in order to make them easily understood, for there is no other way of explaining this (Aññathā pana avabodhetuṃ na sakkā). Thus, the commentator on *Paṭisambhidāmagga* had to clearly define that there is no own-nature in Dhamma. What is clear is that , though under the influence of Sarvāstivāda Svabhāva theory , the Theravādins also defined Dhammas (that is constituent elements) as those which bear their own self-nature, they had to fuse this view with the "Anatta" theory and harmonize the two view. This why David J. Kalupahana (loc. cit.) calls Buddhaghosa 'the harmonizer'. After analyzing various attempts

made by Buddhaghosa to harmonize different views, Professor, Kalupahana sum up saying:

> *" It is also an interesting way to reconcile two philosophical standpoints- the foundationalism or essentialism with which he began the work, and the anti-foundationism or anti-essentialism embodied in the three gateways to freedom (Animitta, appanihita and suñña). It is indeed a work of highest erudition on the part of a great harmonizer" (ibid.p216)(8).*

5.2.3. Early Buddhism

In spite of his inclination towards the Sarvāstivāda essentialist view, ven: Buddhaghosa firmly holds on to the old Buddhist definition of Suñña. The *Visuddhimagga* contains numerous reference to Suñña, sometimes presented fairly elaborately. In Buddhist texts Suñña/Suññata has been considered from different standpoints. The most fundamental standpoint is that everything that is empirical that we understand through our sense organs, is empty. In this sense the whole world (the world as explained in early suttas is the six sense faculties and their corresponding objects) is void. This is clear from the advise the Buddha gave to Mogharāja in the *Suttanipāta.* Therein he said that , in order to go beyond the reach of the kind of death (Maccurāja) one should observe the world as being void (Suññato lokaṃ avekkhassu-Mogharājā sadāsato,evaṃ lokaṃ avekkhantaṃ maccurājā na passati).

That this is the fundamental position taken up by the Buddha is clearly seen from suttas (eg; "Anattalakkhana", "Poṭṭhapāda", etc). The "Suññatānupassanā" section of XXI chapter of the *Visuddhimagga* called "Paṭipadā-ñāṇa-dassana visuddhi-niddesa".

(p653) deals with Suññata elaborately. In this it is explained how one should discern in two logical way that everything is void of self or what belongs to self (Attena vā attanīyena vā). This has to be considered in relation to the "Aneñjasappāya Sutta" of the *Majjhimanikāya* (II.263)(9). which explain the method of realizing the 'sphere of nothingness' (Ākiñcaññāyatana). The *Visuddhimagga* explains clearly the practice referred to in the above Sutta. It says:

> ***" when he has thus seen that there is neither a self or anything related to a self, reflects in the following fourfold manner: I am not anything belonging to argue anywhere, nor is there anything belonging to one anywhere (N'ahaṃ kvacāmi kassaci kiñcana tasmiṃ naca mama kvacāmi kismiñci kiñcana atthi ti). When reflecting thus he completely gets rid of the soul-view or anything connected to a soul. Then he does not see a self in one self , does not attribute a self to another , nor bring another's self in to oneself (Neva kattha ci attānaṃ passati, na taṃ parassa kiñcanabhāve upanetabbaṃ passati na parassa attānaṃ attano kiñcanabhāve upanetabbaṃ passati: tasmā' neva catukotika suññata pariggahitvā hoti)"(10).***

5.2.4. Similies.

Similarly, Suññata is applied to all six sense organs , making Suññata six-fold. Thus is done void of a self , anything related to self, of permanency of lastingness of eternalism, of being not coming under change (Cakkhuṃ suññaṃ attena vā attanīyena vā niccena vā dhuvena vā sassatena vā vipariṇāmadhammena vā). Similarly are considered the rest of the sense organs. In this manner this observation on the void should be continued as far as aging (Jarā) and death (Maraṇa)(Cakkhu sammphassoti evaṃ jarā maraṇa nayo netabbaṃ).

Thus the *Visuddhimagga* says that after describing voidness in the above described six modes, one should discern it again in eight modes in the following mannar:

> " ***Materiality has no care, is coreless, without core. As far as concern (i) any core of permanence (ii) core of lastingness (iii) core of pleasure (iv) core of self (vi) core of what is lasting (vii) core of what is eternal (viii) core of what is not subject to change"(11).***

The terms used here namely **Asāra** (coreless), **Nissāra** (without core), **Niccasārāsārena** (any core pertaining to permanency), etc, all very emphatically show the wide application given to the term Suñña in Pāli Buddhism . It deies all terms of essence and substance, and again and again stresses the fact that , everything is impermanent, not static and firm, always subject to change (Vipariṇāmadhamma). Nicca (permanent), Dhuva (lasting) and Sassata(etenal) are all qualities of the self/soul. Buddhism totally rejects such qualities as attribute of anything empirical . Anicca Addhuva, and Asassata are the attribute all things. This is the Buddhist standpoint.

The above eight modes, like the given six modes, have to be applied to all sense organs etc. To bring out this idea of 'void' (Suñña) a number of apt similies are presented by Buddhaghosa. " ***just as reed has no core, is coreless, without a core,….just as a caster-oil plant,…. A fig tree,…. Setavaccha tree,…palibhaddaka tree….a lump of froth,….a bubble of water…… a mirage …..a plantain trunk… a conjuring trick has no core…….". (12).*** These similies are taken from the suttas and cited to show voidness of all phenomena.

These similies often found in Pāli as well as Sanskrit Buddhist texts to bring out the essenceless of everything. The term **"Māyā" (a conjuring trick)** clearly shows that the belief in an essence or a substance is merely an imagination, a deception of the mind . It shows that the beings are cheated by their own minds and the vision is distorted to assume something (kinci) that lies behind the five aggregates. Everything is as empty of any substance that it is like a **'mirage' (Marīci)** a mere appearance, a deception, an optical illution. It is like a plantain tree trunk (Kadalikhandha), which though having a mass, a bulk , in fact is without any underlying essence (Aāra, Nissāra), ultimately empty (Suñña) of any essence.

Then again the *Visuddhimagga* refers to ten modes of void: It says seeing materiality(Rūpa) as empty, vain no self, with an over-lord, one wishes, not coming under one's control, alien, aloof.(13). So should the other aggregates be viewed as **empty (Ritta)** and **vain (Tucca)**. These two terms are often used synonymously with Suñña even in early suttas. Even in early suttas it is argued that, if there is a self and this self could be called 'this I am' (eso aham asmi) 'this is mine' (etam mama) 'this is myself' (eso me atta) then the Buddha says, this socalled atta should come under ones control. But, this is not to be. This aspect is well brought out by such term as '**Anissarīyato**', '**Akāmakārīyato**', **Āvāsavattako**', meaning without an overlord, incapable of making it do what one wants it to do , and not coming under one's control. Thus, one can see Buddhaghosa, marshalling all possible descriptive terms to bring out the emptiness

(Suññata/ Śūnyatā) of the sense organs, the aggregates etc, which means everything (Sabbe).

Then he refers to twelve modes of Suñña in which everything should be viewed. He says 'materiality should be viewed as having no living being (Na satto) no soul (Na jīvo) no man (Na mānavo) , no female (Na atta), no male (Na puriso), no self (Na atta), no anything related to slef (Na attanīyena), not I (Na ahaṃ), not mine (Na mama), not anothers (Na aññassa) and not anyone's (Na kassaci). This shows how minutely Buddhaghosa has tried to analysis what is meant by void (Suñña). There is to make one understand the complete absence of any conceivable 'thing' as underlying the five aggregates. In doing this ven: Buddhaghosa firmly upholds the early Buddhist view that there is nothing that could be conceived or called as the 'self' or anything related to a self as lying behind concealed in the five aggregates. The aggregates themselves are presented by the Buddha as ever changing forces, always in flux, subject to change to rise and fall.(Uppāda-vaya). Buddhaghosha very aptly brings out this fundamental teaching of the Buddha.

Ven: Buddhaghosa does not stop here. He goes to enumerate forty standpoints from which the five aggregates are to be viewed as being void of a self. He says materiality (Rūpam) should be seen from the standpoint of impermanence(Aniccato), non-satisfactoriness(Dukkhato), of a disease (Rogato), fumour (Aghato), an afflication (Abaddhato), an alien (Parato), as disentergrating (Palokato) , a plague (Ititi) a disaster (Upaddavato), a fear (Bhāyato), a menace (Upasaggato), as fickle (Calato), perishable (Pabhaisguto)

unenduring (Addhuavato), without protection (Atanato), with no shelter (Alenato) , no refuge (Asaraṇato), not fit to be a refuge (Asaraṇibhūtato), as empty (Rittato), as vain (Tucchato), as void (Suññato), without self (Anattato) as a danger (Ādinavato), as subject to change no core (Asārakato), as the root of calamity (Aghamūlato).as murderous (Vādakato), as due to be destroyed (Vibhāvato), subject to cankers (Sasārato), as compounded (Sakhatato), as mara's bait (Māravisato), as subject to birth (Jātidhammato) as subject to decay (Jarādhammato) , as subject to sickness (Vyādhidhammato), as subject to death (Maraṇadhammato), as subject to sorrow, lamentation , pain and despair (Soka- parideva- dukkha- upāyāsadhammato). Subject to arising (Samudayato), subject to setting dowers (Atthānugamato), as being without escape (Nissaranato).

Among these forty adjectival terms, there are repetitions. Yet, many are new and they are not ven: Buddhaghosa's own inventions, but terms found scattered in the suttas, to show the essencelessness, the emptiness, the voidness, of all five aggregates, which include the individual and the world of experience. Buddhaghosa has not totally defended on Pāli inscriptions. And this shows how much emptiness the suttas have laid as pointing out that the whole world is void of any substance, whatever name one gives to that substance, whether one calls it the self (Atta) or anything related to self (Attanīya).

It is also necessary to remember that it is not only a rejection of a soul, but a rejection of anything substantial, or with essence that is underlying anything in the world; whether it be the individual or any other thing in the world. This should make it very clear that the

analysis presented in Pāli scriptures ,from suttas up to commentarial literature, did not limit its rejection of a self to the rejection of only an individual self /soul (Pudgalanairātmiya).

The "Anatta" doctrine covered the whole world, including the individual. Therefore, Anatta doctrine is at the same time a rejection of any substance with elements, the dhammas that constitute the individual and the world. The five aggregates are these elements which are further elaborated in Abhidhamma. All these are analyzed and shown to be without anything substantial underlying them. This shows clearly "Anatta" mean, not only Pudgalanairātmya (absence of an individual self), but also Dharma-nairātmya (voidness of all elements). The whole world – both the individual and the world in which he lives is empty void. This is the early teaching , the teaching of the Buddha himself. Later Buddhism , the Theravāda strongly adhere to and uphold this original teaching. This seen in the *Visuddhimagga*, also. This does not , however, exhaust the treatment of Suññata in Buddhist literature. There are numerous other references showing various other standpoints from which the individual and his world should be observed as being completely void of anything that is substantial. *Sammohavinodani* (p261)(14), the *Vibhangṭṭthakathā*, deals with ninety-six modes of Suññata. What all this shows is that by this time the terms "Suñña" and "Suññata" had gathered more significance ,and sometimes becoming more prominent than "Anatta". This , perhaps may be due to the influence of the development of Buddhist thought that was taking place in India, specially the

development and popularity Madhyamaka philosophy , which treats Śūnya /Śūnyatā as its basic doctrinal teaching.

It has already been clearly pointed out that Anatta, Suñña, and Paṭiccasamuppāda are not three different doctrinal explanation regarding the true nature of reality, but the one and the same teaching viewed from three different standpoints. This means that, this is the central teaching of Buddhism , the teaching in which all other teachings are dependent. All other teachings are formulated and explained on the basis of this fundamental teaching which says that , everything is without a self, it is void and dependently arisen.

The *Visuddhimagga*, too, keeping with this early identification ,explains the twelve fold voidness is relation to Paṭiccasamuppāda. This is not an innovation by budhaghosa, but merely a re-enumeration of the teaching found in the suttas. As W.S. Karunaratne in his book **Theory of Causality** _(.p180) shows this identification of Suññata with Paṭiccasamuppāda comes about as a logical development of the concept of Suññata to explain the arisen and ceasing of Dukkha or the loka, or the world. This is explained in Buddhism through a theory of causal dependence of 12 factors beginning with ignorance (Avijjā). These causal factors are mutually related and dependent conditions ,and all of them being conditions are void of any independent existence. This , in other words, is void of any independent substantial existence. The *Visuddhimagga* puts across this fundamental truth very clearly in the following manner.

" However, ignorance-and likewise factors consisting of formation etc,- is void of lastingness since its nature is to rise and fall, and it is void of beauty since it is defiled and causes

defilement, and it is void of pleasure since it is oppressed by rise and fall, and it is void of any selfhood that comes under one's power since it exist in dependence on conditions; or ignorance –and likewise the factors consisting of formation etc- is neither self nor in self nor possessed of. That is why this whole of becoming (Bhavacakkaṃ) should be understood as being void with this twelve fold voidness."(15).

This explanation is based on the early Buddhist point of void regarding the non-substantiality of the Paṭiccasamuppāda. Whatever is conditional, causally dependent cannot leave independent existence. So is the whole of existence. The whole process is in a flux, all the time turning and changing. This is the fundamental characteristics of all paṭiccasamuppanna or dependently arisen things. The whole of existence represented by , therefore, void (Suñña) any independent existence.The foregoing account very show that the view that Suññata/ Śūnyatā theory is a new innovation by the Madhyamaka founder, and that it is not found in early Buddhism is definitely a baseless one. There is ample textual evidence, ranging from the early suttas to post-canonical and commentarial literature, to firmly establish that the all phenomena – that is both the individual (Puggala/Pudgala) as well as all elements that go to constitute the individual and his world (Dhamma/Dharma)- are void (Suñña) of anything substantial, that they are void of any essential thing is the early Buddhist view regarding the true nature of reality. It is this knowledge , that is the knowledge that 'everything' is void of any self or soul or anything related to a self or soul (Attena vā attanīyena vā), is the final knowledge called knowledge regarding how things have come to be (Yathābhūtañāṇa). It is this knowledge that makes one understand that one is emancipated from Dukkha.

End- notes

(1) *Dhammapada* Stanza 279.

"Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā'ti-yadā paññāya passati.

Atha nibbindati dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā."

Stanza 278.

" Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā'ti- yadā paññāya passati

Atha nibbindati dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā."

Stanza 277.

"Sabbe dhammā anattā'ti yadā paññāya passati

Atha nibbindati dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā"

(2) Y. Karinadasa, "Vibhajjavāda verses Sarvāstivāda: The Buddhist controversy as Time", *Kalyāni Jurnal of Humanities* , Social science , University of Kalaniya, vol. II, P1.

(3) Hasting's *Ensyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol; 2, p 887;

E. W. Adhikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon* , Colombo, M.D. Gunasena ltd, 1953, p 4.

(4) *Path of Purification*, translation. Of *Visuddhimagga,* Colombo, 1964, p. XIX.

(5) David J. Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy, Continuities and Discontinuities,* 1992, University of Hawaii Press, chapter. XXI.

(6) *Abhidhamma Mūlaṭikā,* ed, D. Paññāsāra, and P. Wimaladhamma, Colombo, 1931, p. 21.

(7) ibid. p21, " Ruppanādi hi aññe rūpādayo , Kakkhalādihi ca aññe paṭhavi-ādayo dhamma vijjnti. aññatta pana avabhodhetum na sakkā ti....Svabhāva dhamme aññe viyākatvā attano sabhāvaṃ dharenti ti vuttaṃ"

(8) ibid. p 216.

(9) *Majjhimanikāya*, "Anañjasappāyasutta", II ,263

(10) *Visuddhimagga,* p 654,

"Neva kattha ci attānaṃ passati, na taṃ parassa kiñcanabhāve upanetabbaṃ passati na parassa attānaṃ attano kiñcanabhāve upanetabbaṃ passati tasmā . catukotika suññatā pariggahitā hoti".

(11) *Visuddhimagga,* p 654,

"Evaṃ cha hi ākārehi suññataṃ pariggahetvā, puna ,aṭṭhahi'ākārehi pariggahesi seyyathīdaṃ: rūpaṃ asāraṃ, nissāraṃ, sarā'pagataṃ, niccasārāsārena vā dhuvasārāsārena vā sukhasārāsārena vā attasārāsārena vā niccena vā dhuvena vā sassatena vā aviparināma dhammena vā"

(12) *Visuddhimagga,* p 654-655,

"Yathā nalo... erando...udumbero...setavaccho...Palibhaddaka... phena-piṇḍo... udakabubbūlaṃ...marīci.. kadalikhandho...māyā.."

(13) *Visuddhimagga*, p 655, " Rūpaṃ rittato passāti, tuccato, Suññato, Anattato, anissarīyato, akāmakārīyato, alabbhanīyato, āvāsavattakato, parato, vivittato..."

(14) *Sammohavinodani* p 261.

(15) *Visuddhimagga*, p

" Yasmā pana ettha Avijjā udayabbyāya dhammakathā dhuvabhāvena, sakiliṭṭhakattā saṅkilesikattā ca subhabhāvena, udayabbayapīlitattā sukhabhāvena, paccayayattavuttitattā vāsavattana bhūtena, attabhāven ca Suñña. Tattha saṅkhārādinihi aṅgāni. Yasmā vā avijjā na attā , na attano, na attaniyena vā ti, tathā saṅkhārādini pi aṅgāni, tasmā dvādasavidhasuññatā suññaṃ etaṃ bhavacakkaṃ ti veditabbaṃ".

Chapter 6

Nibbāna as Sañña/Suññata

6.1. Nibbāna.

Nibbāna is the goal to be reached through the practice put forward in Buddhism. According to texts a person who has realized Nibbāna is a "perfect being", and hence, he becomes worthy of reverence, veneration. This is why he is called an "Arahat", meaning "one who in worthy", what this Nibbāna is has been, a matter of much discussion from very early times. There is a strong view which says that Nibbāna is supra-mundane (Lokottara) and, therefore, cannot be described in words. Whether Nibbāna is describable or not has been a debated point and even theses have been complied on this issue. One of the latest *is Nirvāna and Ineffability, A Study of the Buddhist Theory of Reality and Language,* by Prof; Asangha Tilakarathne, (1). In this book author strongly argues that Nibbāna is effable as presented in early suttas. Besides, there are many reference in the suttas themselves which present attempt to describe Nibbāna. The *Thera-Therigāthā,* contains utterances of joy of monks and nuns who had realized Nibbāna. These contain expression describing what Nibbāna is. So, these suggest that though there is a belief that Nibbāna is not possible to described in words, there are attempts made at describing and defining it; though these may be different from each other and , perhaps , also not quite "perfect" and "conclusive".

6.1.1. Four fold truths

Therefore, in order to understand the nature of Nibbāna, it is necessary to make a study of these descriptions and definitions, and find out what could be gathered from them regarding the nature of Nibbāna. As satated at the beginning Nibbāna is <u>**Summum bonum,**</u> the highest bliss, put forward in Buddhism. There is a scheme of fourfold truth (Cattāri ariyasaccāni) taught in Buddhism. These are:

(1) The noble truth regarding suffering (Dukkha ariya sacca)

(2) The noble truth regarding the arising of suffering (Dukkha-samudaya-ariya-sacca)

(3) The noble truth regarding the cesSātion of suffering (Dukkha-nirodha- ariya-sacca)

(4) The noble truth regarding the path leading to the cessation of suffering (Dukkha-niradha-gāminī-patipadā-aryia-sacca).

Of these four truths, the third refers to Nibbāna. The word used for Nibbāna in that four fold scheme of truth is "nirodha" meaning cessation . The examination of the fourfold truth is very important to get a clear idea of what Nibbāna mean. It is generally believed that this scheme of fourfold truth contains in it the essence of the whole teaching of the Buddha, that is both theory and practice of Buddhism. Taken simply, this scheme of fourfold truth is about <u>Dukkha</u>, that is the human predicament; the cause of its arising <u>(Samudaya)</u>; the possibility of the cessation <u>(Nirodha)</u> of this predicament, and finally,

the way or the practice leading to this cessation. The essence of this teaching is that there is Dukkha and there is its cessation. That the cessātion of Dukkha is the objective of practicing the path is very clear . The Buddha himself declared the purpose of his mission has more than once made it clear that he is trying to explain the prevalence of Dukkha and the possibility of its cessation. (Pubbe c'āhaṃ etarahi ca dukkhaṃ paññapemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ:)(2) The Buddha while giving admission and granting higher ordination says: "come o' monk, well declared is the doctrine, follow the noble conduct for the complete ending of Dukkha"(3).

6.1.2. Reason to Dukkha.

This makes it abundantly clear that the sole purpose of following the path is the realization of cessation of Dukkha. When viewed from this standpoint the definitions of Nibbāna as the end Dukkha-nirodha (cessation of Dukkha) or Dukkhassanta (end of Dukkha) Dukkhakkhayāya (destruction of Dukkha) or even Dukkhassa atikkamma (going beyond Dukkha are quite apt. Then the question arises as to what causes Dukkha?, How does Dukkha arise?. The basic Buddhist position is that Dukkha is also dependently arisen. The general explanation is that Dukkha is due to various defilements of man. There are three main defilements that cause Dukkha. These are attachment/greed, hatred and delusion (Rāga, Dosa, and Moha). If these are the causes of Dukkha , then their destruction will certainly put an end to Dukkha. In this sense that Nibbāna is called the destruction of these three defiling forces, desire, hated and delusion

(Rāgakkhayo, Dosakkhayo, Mohakkhayo); or on *Saṃuttanikāya*(V,8) says that which is the destruction of desire , hate and delusion , that is called the deathless (4). Similarly ta hā, which also means desire, is considered as the primary cause of Dukkha. This is stated very clearly in the second of Four Noble Truths, the (Dukkha samudaya ariyasacca.)

Explaining this the "Dhammacakkhappavattanasutta" states: It is this desire (thirst, Crāving=taṇhā,) which produces re-becoming and which is bound up with passionate greed, which finds fresh delight now here, now there namely, desire for sense-pleasure (Kāma-taṇhā,) desire for existence (Bhava-taṇhā,) and desire for non-existence (Vibhava-taṇhā,)(5). But one has to understand that Buddhism does not posit a First Cause or a Single cause. From the above account itself it is seen that different causes have been cited as the source of Dukkha. The twelve linked formula of dependent origination , which is meant specially to explain the arising of Dukkha and its cessation, begins with ignorance (Avijjā) as the primary cause of Dukkha.

What is seen from these is that depending on the context different causes are cited , which from that partiCūlar stand point appear as the most salient cause. All these cause are contributing to the arising of Dukkha , though none of them can be called the First Cause. Buddhism explains Dukkha on a causal basis. When certain causes and conditions prevail, certain effects take place and when those particular causes and conditions are absent the effects , too, cease to be present. Therefore, there is no possibility of pin-pointing a single or First Cause, though a more prominent cause among them could be cited and this is Avijjā (ignorance).

6.1.3. Path Cessation to Dukkha

That Avijjā is the most salient cause, (though it too arisen due to other causes and conditions), is seen when one looks at the question of Dukkha from the standpoint of the path leading to the cessation of Dukkha. This path which consists of 8 factors (Aṅga) and hence , called the Noble-Eightfold path (Ariya aṭṭhaṅghika-magga) is a three-phases one. It is a graduated cause of action or training or path(Anupubba kiriyā, anupubba sikkhā, anupubbapaṭipadā:) (6) and comprises of developing morality (Sīla) mental concentration (Samādhi) and wisdom (Paññā). Though all three kinds of training are inter-related , the climax is the development of wisdom (Paññā/ Prajñā). Sīla and Samādhi function as conditions (Upanisā) for Paññā, without which emancipation , that is realization of the end of Dukkha is not possible.

The Paññā, that is insight wisdom and not mere intellectual understanding , is really the key to freedom. Thus, it is often said, " Paññāya ca disvā āsavā parikkhīnā honti : (seen by wisdom the defilements become destroyed) or Paññā,-paribhāvitaṃ cittaṃ sammad eva āsavehi vimmuccati (the mind cultured with wisdom gets completely free from defilements).(7). It is true that other two factors sila (morality) and Samādhi (mental concentration are indispensable for the production of Paññā, (wisdom). This is why the *Dhammapada* versa No 372 (8) says : ***"There is meditation for one who is without wisdom, and similarly, there is no wisdom for one who is without meditation".***

Thus, all three trainings (sikkha) sila (morality) Samādhi (mental concentration) and Paññā, (wisdom) are essential for one to realize Nibbāna. Their mutual dependence of all three are stressed at various places in the suttas. Thus the *Samyuttanikāya* says (9) that a wise person having established himself in morality should culture his mind and wisdom (Sīle patiṭṭhāya naro sapañño cittaṃ paññaṃ ca bhāvayaṃ). But yet Paññā, is the climax, and it is Paññā, helped by Sila and Samādhi that brings about emancipation (10). If wisdom is what finally brings about freedom, then it is lack of wisdom, or ignorance that is the major hindrance to emancipation . What is this ignorance ? (Avijjā). The general definition of Avijjā is ignorance. Some of the earliest definitions of Avijjā is found in the *Samyuttanikāya.* Therein it is said that Avijjā (ignorance) is the lack of knowledge regarding the Four Noble Truths (Catu sacce aññāṇaṃ)(11). From this it appears that Buddhism , though does not posit a First cause or single cause, considered in this instance, ignorance (Avijjā) as the most fundamental cause of suffering .

6.1.4. Dukkha and Loka

The Four Noble Truths, which is considered as the summarized presentation of the crux of the Buddha 's teaching is about the true nature of things. This primarily focuses on Dukkha (suffering). But in Buddhism the words Dukkha (suffering) and Loka (world) a synonymous. This is further seen from the Buddhist view that the world is established in Dukkha (Dukkhe loko patiṭṭhito). In the Buddhist point of view , Loka or the world is one's sense organ and

their corresponding objects. Thus, lack of knowledge or ignorance regarding Dukkha means ignorance regarding oneself and his world of experiences . Individual and the world are not two separate things , for it is the individual that builds up his own world. As Dukkha and loka are synonymous in meaning, building up one's world means creating one's own Dukkha . This fact is very effectively stated in the "Rohitassasutta" of the "Devaputtasaṃyutta" in the *Saṃyuttanikāya.*(12). ***"It is this fathom long body endowed with perception and consciousness that make known the world , the origin of the world , the cessation of the world, and the way to leading to the cessation of the world".*** Herein this explanation of the prevalence, origin , cessation and the path leading to Dukkha, as loka is nothing other than Dukkha. The world with which the Buddha is concerned is 'one's world of experience', for it is from this world of experience that Dukkha originates. To reach the end of Dukkha which is Nibbāna. or to reach the end of the world (=Loka=Dukkha) one has to turn ignorance in to knowledge regarding Dukkha or the loka. It is our ignorance regarding this that is called Avijjā; this in other words is explained as the lack of knowledge regarding the Four Noble Truths. Being engrossed and immersed in Avijjā we all fail to see the true nature of ourselves and the world of our experiences. That is to correctly see reality. It is this that causes Dukkha in us. Therefore, in the final analysis the Dukkha we create for ourselves is due to our distorted vision of the true nature of things. This lack of understanding of the true nature of things is ignorance.

6.2. Wrong understanding of the world

How does our vision gets distorted? This is explained in numerous ways in the suttas. There are many factors that contribute to the process of distorting our vision . The Buddha has very clearly pointed out that there are number of instincts in us that motivate us in all our activities. Among such motivating factors our desire for pleasure, for happiness is a major one . This is called Sukha-kāma. This functions is another way , and make us dislike suffering (Dukkha paṭikūla) (13). Similarly, all of us are motivated by our desire to survive and avoid dying (Amaritukāma). These motives influence everyone from his birth , and all one's actions are influenced by them.

There is a constant conflict among these extreme desires of avoiding death, continuing to survives ; avoiding suffering and enjoying happiness. We hate and detest death and suffering . We eagerly embrace survival and happiness. These motives, greatly shape our "likes" and "dislikes". Whatever is causing unhappiness and suffering , we hate. Their opposites we like .This we do instinctively, without any understanding of the nature of things that cause what we consider is happiness or suffering. Our desire for continuous ,untrammeled happiness and eternal life blind us from the true nature of reality, of life that we live.

The Buddha's explanation of sense- perception explains clearly how this distortion of views takes place. The best source for this is the "Madhupiṇḍika Sutta" (14). This Sutta was not preached by the Buddha himself. It was preached by Venerable Mahākccāna one of the best exponents of the Dhamma , elaborating a short-discourse by the

Buddha. However, when informed about it the Buddha totally approved it and gave it this specific name, the "Madhupiṇḍika Sutta" (The Honey-ball Sutta). Explaining the process of sense-perceptions this Sutta sys:

> ***" Depending on the eye and visible form arises visual consciousness; meeting of the three (eye, form, visual consciousness) is contact (Phassa); because of contact arise feeling (Vedanā); what one feels, one perceives (Sañjānāti); what one perceives that one reflects upon (Vitakketi); what one reflects upon, with that one is obsessed with, (Papañceti); what one is obsessed with, due to that concepts marked by such obsessed perception (Papañca-Saññā-saṇkhārā), begin to assail him with regarding to visible forms cognizable by the eye, belonging to past present and future"***

This is the case with the other sense organs. It is this perceptual process that gets distorted at a particular point and makes us ignorant about the true nature of things. How does this distortion happen? If one examine this process of perception one would see that it starts as, an impersonal one, without any prejudices preconceived notions of likes and dislikes. It goes on at this impersonal level till the rising of feeling (Vedanā). This Vedanā or feeling , though manifold according to the "Bahuvedanīyasutta" of the *Majjhimanikāya* is basically threefold (15).

(1) Pleasant-agreeable (Sukha-vedanā)

(2) Unpleasant- disagreeable (Dukkha- vedanā)

(3) Neutral, neither pleasant nor unpleasant and have neither agreeable nor disagreeable (Adukkhamasukha -vedanā) .

This third category does not really make an impact on the perceiver. They just pass off without producing any response from the

perceiver. But , the other two namely, Sukha-vedanā and Dukkha-vedanā rouse response , their intensity depending on the intensity of either Dukkha or Sukha they generate in the perceiver. We already know that all beings , specially the humans beings , have the survival instinct , the instinct to enjoy pleasure very strongly in them. So, when they receive the impact of these external objects through their sense-doors , they react in proportion to the to the intensity of the pleasurable or displeasurable feeling they receive. With this impact, the impersonal process of perception turns in to a very personal one. The sense of "I-ness" intrudes. The feelings one gets is identified with "I", " mine". Though we are the perceivers, do not realize that, a drastic psychological change is taking place in us. Feelings becomes a personal affair and that makes the impersonal activity of perception. This shows how the belief in the 'I' , the 'mine' (Ahamkāra, mamaṃkāra) creeps in without perceiver's knowledge. All feelings are considered as 'mine" , the perceiver is identified as **"I". It is 'I' who perceives. The feelings experienced are "mine".**

6.2.1. Likes and dislikes

From this point onwards perception is dictated and carried out according to one's 'likes" (Ruci) and "dislikes" (Aruci). Whatever feelings that are pleasant are appreciated and desired. Whatever are unpleasant are frowned upon and hated. However, the process of perception does not stop at this . This bipolar attitudes of "likes" and "dislikes" becomes obsessions (Papañca). Then it goes beyond the control of the perceiver , and the obsession becomes the controlling-

agent of this process of perception . By then the perceiver turn out be hopless, for he cannot control his "likes" and "dislikes" for they control him.These 'likes' and 'dislikes' impose upon objects qualities and characteristics that are not inborn in them. If the perceiver is obsessed with an agreeable feeling, the object of perception gets attributed with all the agreeable qualities. If disagreeable, then the object is imposed with all disagreeable features. This hides the true nature of the object that meets the sense organ. The whole process of perception thus makes a world quite different from what it really is . This is only a made up world.

The mere awareness (Viññāṇa) of the world , of the objects with the rise of feelings becomes objects of personally oriented perception (Saṃjñā/Saññā). When these objects are continuously reflected and thought (Vitakketi), they turn out to be obsessions (Papañca) . With this obsession , thought proliferation increases; the past , present and even future desires , expectations , anxieties related to be these obsessive-objects bombard the mind and fill it with all kinds of defilements . This makes the mind heavily defiled, strongly bonded to samsaric existence which is Dukkha.

6.2.2. Avijjā

As long as Avijjā holds sway, this condition continues further making the mind sick, (Ātura-citta) burning within with fires of greed, hatred and confusion (Rāga-aggi, dosa-aggi, moha-aggi). Being overwhelmed by Avijjā one identifies all 'likes" and "dislikes" as 'mine'. All sense data that one receives through sense-faculties of

sense –objectives from out side world get an egoistic colouring. One views everything from an ego-centric position. He cannot divest these from his self-view (Sakkāya-diṭṭhi). He even holds the five aggregates as 'this is mine' (Etaṃ mama), 'this I am' (Eso'hamasmi') 'this is myself' (Eso me attā). So 'I' becomes the reality. Thus, Avijjā implants an atta (self) , where there is no 'atta' (self), but only five aggregate. Thus, one gets more and more engrossed in Dukkha.

Viewing from this egocentric viewpoint one sees permanency in things where there is no permanency (Anicce nicca saññā), happiness where there is no unhappiness (Dukkhe sukha Saññā), and a self where there is no self (Anattani atta saññīī)(16). Being spurred by Avijjā one on the one hand begins to crave and yearn for things that one likes ; on the other one begins to hate things that one dislikes and detest. Thus, one is being through out torn apart by this bipolar forces, making him suffer under this unending conflict. The plight of such a person is well presented in the *Suttanipāta* (17).

" By whatever (criterion) they think, contrary to it does it to pass; that to him is, indeed , false too, it is deluding element (subject to decay) and transitory"

The more the Vijjā operates, the more the mind gets defiled and bogged down in Dukkha. There is no other way out of this than to develop Pññā (wisdom), for it is through panna that Avijjā could be driven away, and the mind freed from all defilements; the burning within could be put out. The *Saṃyuttanikāya* "Salāyatanasaṃyutta" (18) describes this condition as follows;

" All is burning. And what Bhikkhus is all that is burning?. The eye is burning, forms are burning, eye-contact is burning

and whatever feeling arises with eye contact as condition-that too is burning. Burning with what?. Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of delusion ; burning with birth, aging, death; with sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure and despair . Similarly the ear is burning...." And so on.

This fire has to be extinguished and make the person becomes cool within (Sītibhūta). The defilements that serve as fuel for this fire to burn continuously has to be flushed out of the mind. The mind has to be completely freed of these influxes (Āsavas). If Avijjā in the salient cause of all this , then it has to be removed to bring about a change in this condition for the better.

As Avijjā means ignorance or a distorted vision of reality, then to get over it the vision has to be straightened. This means to get a correct vision of reality. There is a fundamental way for this; and it is called the Noble Eightfold Path. This path consists of the development of threefold training of morality (Sīla), mental concentration (Samādhi)and wisdom (Paññā). Depending morality and mental concentration wisdom or insight knowledge (Vipassanā) has to be developed. The whole path/practice (Magga/Paṭipada) is about developing these trainings that finally lead to wisdom or insight knowledge (Vipassanā). This insight knowledge gives the ability to see things penetratively (Vi-pas, to see through). Seeing through is to go beneath what appears to the naked perception , and perceive things in their true nature. This is called the "knowing and seeing" (Jñāṇaṃ-passaṃ) things as to how they have come to be (Yathā-bhuta-ñāṇa-dassana).

With this knowing and seeing one could straighten one's view, and see the process through which is a personal experience , completely dispels the view of ignorance that has been colouring our vision of things. It would bring a total change in our perception. It will make us understand how we have been pushed and urged by our desires, detests and delusion, in other words through our ego-centrism, imposing permanency, happiness and substantiality on things that are inherently 'void' of (Suññā) such attributes.

Development of this wisdom or insight knowledge is what lead one to the realization of Nibbāna, which means the dawn or the arising of a new knowledge , a new vision, un spoilt by any defilement. It is defilements known by different words in Buddhist texts (for example: Kilesa =Klesa, Saṃyojana, Bandhana, / Āsava=Āsrava) that have been instrumental in distorting one's vision and leading one stray, away from reality. With the rising of this wisdom (Pññā/Prajñā) the defilements are flushed out of the mind; the mind is totally freed of the defilements (Āsavehi cittaṃ vimuccati) ; this gives one the knowledge that all Āsavas are destroyed (Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa). With that emancipatory knowledge one comes to see reality. (Vimuttasmiṃ vimuttamiti ñāṇaṃ hoti).

6.3. The way of experience.

From the foregoing what is clear is that major hindrance that stands on the way to emancipation is ignorance about the true nature of reality. To obtain knowledge regarding the true nature of reality there are many methods mentioned in the suttas. But it is necessary to

remember here that the knowledge (Paññā/Prajñā) that destroys Āsava and bring about emancipation (Vimutti/Vimukti) is something different from mere factual or logical knowledge. It has to be insight knowledge a 'knowing and seeing,' going far beneath the surface , the mere appearance of things; a knowledge completely freed from all 'likes' and 'dislikes'. It such knowledge that could destroy the Āsavas that are defiling the mind. This knowledge has to be a personal experience of the real nature of things . What is the real nature ?. It is that everything is impermanent (Anicca); everything is suffering or non-Sātisfactory (Dukkha); everything is void of a self or substance , anything that is permanent , eternal, not getting destroyed (Anatta). These are the three inherent characteristics of all phenomena. Seeing all conditional things (Saṅkhata dhamma) as impermanent (Anicca) and non- satisfactory (Dukkha) and seeing both all conditioned as well as unconditioned (Asaṅkhata) things as impermanent, non-satisfactory and also void of reality is his knowledge of things as they are (Yathābhūtañāṇa). It is experiencing or truly 'knowing and seeing' (Jñāṇaṃ-passaṃ) the voidness (Suññata) of all things that is the realization of Nibbāna.

6.3.2. Padhāna

The mind has to be trained to know and see in this manner. This is a fairly long and as hard process which requires firm resolve and striving, and hence called **"Padhāna"**, which is used from early times to refer to mental striving. First one should obtain an empirical understanding of reality and then internalize this understanding as a

personal experience through the process of meditations. An initial requirement for this is attainment of a high level of mental concentration and the suppression of hindrances such as sensual lust (=craving) (Kāmacchanda), ill-will, that is hatred (Vyāpāda), mental sloth and topple (Thīna-middha), mental agitation and anxiety (Uddhacca-kukkucca) and doubt (Vicikicchā). The Buddha used the supra-mundane jhanas that is the latter four Jhānas belonging to the supra-mundane mental sphere to attune the mind and make it realize the true nature of reality. At least, for a particular period of time, when the mind abides in that level, the four immaterial Jhānas are also called in suttas (19) 'the peaceful immaterial liberations transcending material form (Santa vimokkha atikammarūpa aruppa). These four are conscious levels achieved by beyond all perceptions of mental forms and hence , they are immaterial. The objects of consciousness are progressively subtler. Thus, a meditator can progressively adopt 'boundless space'(Ākāsanañcāyatana), then boundless consciousness (Viññāṇañcāyatana), which is more subtler than space. From that he could proceed to the sphere of nothingness (Ākiñcaññāyatana). Though the mind could experience "voidness" (Suññata) at this stage, this "voidness", as it is taken as the object of meditation, gets "objectified" as "something" and therefore, it is not the total experience of "voidness".

6.3.2. Nirodha samāpatti

One could raise his consciousness still further by entering in to the base of 'neither perception nor non-perception', which is devoid of

gross perception and all mental functions are reduced to the subtlest-level. At this level one may be experiencing the 'emptiness' more intensively. Buddhist system of meditative practices goes a step further and present a higher attainment called Saññāvedayita nirodha meaning the cessation of perception and feeling. This is also called Nirodha-samāpatti. This attainment is the logical climax of the jhanic process starting from the First Jhāna and developing the mind gradually to subtler states finally ending up in totally stopping of all perception and feelings. In this state one is totally cut off from the sensory world. He, in this state is almost like dead but not dead. As his perceptions and feelings have all stopped functioning he is devoid of all conflicting emotions. The "Mahāvedalla Sutta" explaining the difference between one who is dead and one who is in Nirodha samapatti says:

> *" In the case of one who is dead his bodily formations have ceased and subsided, him verbal formations have ceased and subsided his mental formations have ceased and subsided, his vitality is exhausted his heat has been dissipated and his faculties are fully broken up. In the case of one who has entered upon Nirodha–samāpatti, his totally formations have ceased and subsided, his verbal formations have ceased and subsided, his mental formations have ceased and subsided, but his vitality is not exhausted his heat has not been dissipated and his faculties become exceptionally clear"*

As the Commentary to this sutta explain in our day to day life we are always impinged and affected by sense objects. Our minds are then like mirrors set up at cross-roads, spoilt and dirty. But this is not the case with one who in Nirodha Samapatti. His faculties are clear , just like a mirror placed in a case and deposited in a box. Thus, this is

a sate in which all sensory contacts with sensory objects are cut off and one is in a total vacuum , a void , free from all conflicts, all perverted views concerning a self and so on. Some even compare this level of consciousness to Nibbāna. But this cannot be because in this state there is no knowledge ; it denotes a state of consciousness in which there is complete disfunction of knowledge. Besides , like all meditative states, this , too, is a temporary realization of emancipation, and hence, different from Nibbāna. This is used though not necessarily , as a stepping stone to the realization of Nibbāna, but it is not Nibbāna itself.

6.4. Meditative attainments.

6.4.1. Ceto-vimutti

Similarly, there are a number of other meditative attainments that help to attune the mind to realization of the voidness (Suññata) of everything. This is done by emptying the mind of all distorted beliefs, views and concepts and bringing about tranquility in the mind. There are such meditative practices called Ceto-vimmutti (deliverance of mind). The "Mahāvedalla Sutta" of the *Majjhimanikāya* (sutta No 43) speaks of several such deliverances of the mind . Among them are 'Upekkha etovimmutti', 'Animitta cetovimmutti', 'Suññata cetovimmutti' and so on. All these are aiming at attuning the mind to understand the 'emptiness' of everything ; on the one hand these process help to flush out of the mind all defiling forces that impose sort of substance or essence on phenomena. On the other these meditative practices leads the mind to penetrate through what appears

on the surface of reality and see its true nature, that everything in the ultimate analysis is truly void or empty of anything that is substantial.

This is very well made clear in the "Mahāvedalla Sutta". It points out that lust (Rāga), hate (Dosa) and delusions (Moha) are makers of measurement (Pamānakaraṇa). These are makers of signs (Nimittakaraṇa). This shows that these defiling forces impose limitation on the mind and fix their range and depth , causing mind to be limited, subjective and very egoistic. These cause the mind to ascribe false significance to phenomena as being permanent , (Nicca), pleasurable (Sukha) and having a self (Atta). In reality these are not characteristic of phenomena , but these are imposed by the mind which is not properly trained to understand the true nature of things as 'void'. Animitta-ceto-samādhi helps the mind to get over its 'sign-maker (Nimitta-karaṇa) function, and see things as signless, that is void of permanency, pleasure and self.

6.4.2. Suññatavihāra

Suññatavihāra, a self of abiding in the void is often referred to as a meditative practice that helps one to experience emptiness of all phenomena. The "Piṇḍapātapārisuddhi Sutta" of the *Majjhimanikāya* (20)refers to this meditative practice. One day the Buddha saw venerable Sāriputta and told him ***"Sāriputta, your faculties are clear. That colour of your skin is pure and bright. What abiding do you often abide in now"*** Venerable Sāriputta answered **" Now Venerable sir, I often abide in Voidness"**. This is described as an abiding (Vihāra) of such great men (Mahāpurisa) as Buddhas,

Paccekabuddhas, and great disciples. Thus the sutta goes on to describe what is meant by abiding in void. According to the Sutta it is the gradual flushing out of all desire, lust, hate, delusion, aversion that is in the mind that rise from contact between sense faculties sense objects. This, one has to go on cultivating till he finally realizes its culmination and experiencing emptiness of all phenomena.

The "Cūla-Suññata Sutta" of the *Majjhimanikāya* (no;121) (21) which has been already discussed in this thesis , explains different levels of progressing through emptiness that could be realized by this practicing. This explains how a monk starts to meditate in a forest and then trains himself to see the forest only, void of other things such as people that are absent in the forest. Then he passes through gradually progressing levels of emptiness and reaches Animitta cetosamādhi('concentration of mind in the signless').

6.4.3. Animitta-ceto-vimutti

Then he begins to reflect in this manner. 'Even this concentration of the mind in the signless is conditioned and volitionally produced . but whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation 。This really in the climax of the abiding , the real experience of voidness of all phenomena, including even this kind of very high mental states. Here the meditator applies his insight wisdom to his high state of consciousness and sees that level of conscious, too, is impermanent and hence subject to ceasing and disappearing. The Buddha 's aim , as said in the "Ariyapariyesana Sutta", is to search for still higher level, a

supreme stats of sublime peace (Santivarapadaṃ) which gives total pacification of all conflicts by realizing the true nature of phenomena . Thus , when the meditator understands that animitta cetovimmutti itself is impermanent and subject to cessation, he realizes the voidness of even that that and this realization leads his mind to liberation from all defilements.

Taking this impermanency of what is willed and mentally constructed as the object of meditation he obtains insight knowledge regarding this true nature of all things. When he knows and sees thus his mind gets liberated from the defilements of sensual desire and of ignorance; when it is liberated there comes the knowledge **"It is liberated"**. He understands. **" Birth is destroyed , holy life has been done, there is no more coming to any state of existence". (22).** There are other meditative practices as the Ānāpānasati (Mindfulness on In and Out Breathing), the four fold establishment of mindfulness (Satipaṭṭhāna) (23). This latter is a comprehensive system of meditation practice that involves both Samatha and Vipassanā. It trains the mind to penetratively to know and see the voidness of all pleasure. For this the meditator uses the body (Kāya) , feeling (Vedanā), mind (Citta) and mind-objects as objects of contemplation. These finally embrace the whole phenomenal world and show the interdependence and relatively of all elements (Dhamma/Dharma); this highlights the dependent origination of all phenomena (Paṭiccasamuppanna) which is nothing other than emptiness or voidness of all phenomena, as everything is void of anything that can be called the self (Atta) or anything related to a self (Attanīya).

The goal to be reached by these practices is the realization of Nibbāna, which in the final analysis means the true nature of things through which understanding all defilements or taints (Āsavas) get destroyed.

<u>End- notes</u>

(1) Asangha Tilakarathna, *Nirvāṇa and Ineffability, A Study of the Buddhist Theory of Reality and Language,* Post-Graduate Institute of Pāli and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka 1993.

(2) *Majjhimanikāya, I,* 140. *Saṃyuttanikāya,* IV, p384. "Pubbe c'āhaṃ etarahi ca dukkhaṃ paññapemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ"

(3) *Vinayapiṭaka,* I, p12,

" Ehi Bhikkhu ti bhagavā avoca, svākkhāto dhammo cara brahmacariyaṃ sammā dukkhassa antakiriyāya"

(4) *Saṃyuttanikāya,* V, p 8. " Yo kho ragakkhayo dosakkhayo mohakkhayo idaṃ vuccati amataṃ"

(5) *Vinayapṭaka,* I, p10, *Saṃyuttanikāya* ,V, p421. "Yāyaṃ taṇhā, ponobhavikā nandirāga sahagatā tatratatrābhinandhīni, seyyāthīdaṃ kāmataṇhā, bhavataṇhā, , vibhavataṇhā, "

(6) *Majjhimanikāya,* I, p479.

(7) *Dīghanikāya,* II, p123." Paññāparibhāvitaṃ cittaṃ sammadeva āsavehi vimuccati".

(8) *Dhammapada,* verse, No, p372, " N'atthi jñāṇaṃ apaññassa-pannññānaṃ'atthi ajjhayato, yamhi jhānaṃ ca pañña ca sa ve nibbāna santike".

(9) *Saṃyuttanikāya,* I, p13, "Sīle patiṭṭhāya naro sapañño cittaṃ paññaṃ ca bhāvayaṃ".

(10). *Dīghanikāya,* II, p91,"Samādhi paribhāvitā paññā Mahāpphalā hoti Mahānisaṃsā paññā paribhāvitaṃ cittaṃ sammad eve āsavehi vimuccati seyyatīdaṃ kāmāsava bhavāsava, avijjāsava diṭṭhāsava".

(11). *Saṃyuttanikāya,* II, p4; IV, p256; V, p429.

(12). Saṃyuttanikāya, I, p144, "Imasmiṃ yeva byāmatte kalebare …lokaṃ ca loka samudayaṃ ca loka-nirodhaṃ ca loka nirodhagāmini-paṭipadaṃ ca ".

(13). *Saṃyuttanikāya,* IV, p172.

(14). *Majjhimanikāya,* I , pp111-112, "Madhupiṇḍika Sutta" " cakkhuṃca paṭicca rupeca uppajjati cakkhuviññāṇaṃ, tinnaṃ saṅgati phasso; phassa-paccayā vedanā; yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti;--; tatonidānaṃ purisaṃ papñacasaññāsaṅkhārā samudācaranti atītānāgata-paccuppannesu cakkhuviññeyyesu rūpesu.

(15). *Majjhimanikāya,* I, p396.

(16). *Aṅguttaranikāya,* II, p52.

(17). *Suttanipāta,* stanza no; 757. " Yena yena hi maññati tato taṃ hoti aññthā- tamhi tassa musā hoti mosadhammā hi ittaraṃ".

(18). *Saṃyuttanikāya,* "Salāyatana Saṃyutta", IV, pp19-20.

(19). *Majjhimanikāya,* I, p33.

(20). *Majjhimanikāya,* III, p294 . " Piṇḍapātapārisuddhisutta".

(21). *Majjhimanikāya,* No; 121, "Cūlasuññatasutta" " Ayaṃ pi kho animitto cetosamādhi abhisaṅkhato abhisañcetayito. Yaṃ kho pana kiñci abhisaṅkhataṃ abhisañcetayitaṃ taṃ aniccaṃ nirodha-dhammā ti pajānāti".

(22). *Majjhimanikāya,* III, p104. " Tassa evaṃ jānato evaṃ passato kāmāsavā pi citta vimuccati, bhavāsava pi cittaṃ vimuccati, it….".

(23). *Dīghanikāya,* No; 22, *Majjhimanikāya,* No; 10.

Chapter 7.

Pāli Suññata and Nāgarjuna's Interpretation

7.1. The way to knowledge.

7.1.1. Pāli Buddhism

As shown in the foregoing chapters Suñña(Suññata) is a concept known to and used by the Buddha himself to present his world-view, to explain the true nature of things. However, there is no doubt that it is Ācārya Nāgārjuna that really popularized this concept, and presented this as the central teaching of the Buddha. Ācārya Nāgārjuna in his *Mūlamadhyamakakāikā* elaborately lays down the fundamental principles of his interpretations of the Buddha 's teaching. This he called the Madhyamaka philosophy. It is very well known that the Buddha avoided resorting to any form of extremism. His first discourse, the "Dhammacakkhappavattana Sutta" delivered to the group of five (Pañcavaggiya), begins with an admonition to avoid the two extreme religious practices that were widely prevalent at that time. One is self-mortification(Attakilamathānuyoga) and the other is self-indulgence (In sensual pleasures- kāmasukhallikānuyoga). Rejecting these he presents a novel religious practice which the Buddha himself call this Middle Practice (Majjhimā paṭipadā).

Any religious practice is based on a philosophy a world view it upholds. Once again it is seen that there were two main philosophies widely in vogue at that time. These were eternalism (Sassatavāda) and annihilationism (Ucchedavāda), both accepting some kind of an entity,

a self/soul (Atta/Ātman); the eternalist believed in a permanent everlasting metaphysical entity. While the annihilationists accepted an impermanent, physical entity , that get destroyed at the death of a person .

The Buddha labels these two philosophies also as being extreme ones ,and presents a middle philosophy which denies an entity, a self , whatever, permanent or not and upholds a novel view which explains everything as being independently as being arising (Paṭiccasamuppanna) rising (Uppāda) and falling (Vaya) and always in a flux. Ignorance of this true nature of things that is everything is dependently arising, and therefore, subject to rise and fall, and hence without any permanent substance is considered in early Buddhism the cause of all Dukkha. This ignorance defiles the mind . The mind is in bondage to continuous existence (Samsāra). This mind has to be cleansed of all defilements in order to attain freedom from recurring births. This cleansing is done by gradual process of moral cultivating , mind development leading to the development of wisdom through which one could see and know the true nature of things; get rid of ignorance, cleanse the mind and attain emancipation.

In this process though morality, cleansing of the mind, and development of wisdom are equally emphasized , Buddhism being a religion that gives more importance to psychology, cleaning of the mind appears to be more emphasized . This is seen by the importance attached to Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa- knowledge regarding the destruction of defilements.

In early Buddhist practice **"knowing and seeing"** of the true nature of things is considered as a personal experience , obtained through one's own superior knowledge (Abhiññā) . Later, when different schools developed the emphasis was more on the use of logic and reasoning to understand the true nature of things. Therefore, schools like Sarvāstivāda came up with different interpretations regarding the nature of reality. This led to concepts like Svabhāva (self-nature). These metaphysical concepts were the results of attempts to explain Anicca and Anatta doctrines logically, using reason as evidences. It is to counter-act these that Madhyamaka school attempted to counter-argue and show that schools such as Sautrāantika, Sarvāstivāda, and such like misrepresented the early teaching of Anicca and Anatta of the Buddha. But unlike the Buddha , Nāgarjuna , the founder of Madhyamaka, also used logic and reasoning . He through his method of argument called **'Apohavāda'**- which shows the internal contradiction of the thesis of other schools- rejects them as self-contradictory and, therefore, ill-logical.

Buddhism, whereas, as shown in previous chapters, attempted to induce the practitioners to "see and know" the true nature of things through personal experience (for example; by such meditative practices of cultivation of Samādhi such as the practice of training the mind to see everything as empty. See the chapter on Cūla-suññata and Mahā-suññatasuttas), Nāgārjuna used his dialectics to give an intellectual understanding of this.

7.1.2. Method of Nāgārjuna

Though the objectives of early Buddhism and Madhyamaka is the same, the methods adopted in realizing the objective are quite different. Early Buddhism openly says that the final realization of the truth is beyond logic and reasoning (Atakkāvacara)Nāgārjuna makes logic and reasoning the predominant means of understanding this truth. The difference is only in the method ; the outcome or the objective intended is the same. Like early Buddhism , Madhyamaka aims at inducing its followers to view everything as dependently arising and therefore, subject to rise and fall. What is subject to rise and fall is impermanent (Anitya /Anicca). What is impermanence is void (Śūnya) or in the more popular early Buddhist terminology, it is void of a soul , anything connected with a soul (Suñño attena vā attanīyena vā). This is exactly what Ācārya Nāgārjuna is trying to remind the Buddhists. As shown before, some Buddhist teachers deviated from this early teaching, and while accepting the voidness of individual of a soul (Anatta) , in a unwitting manner, posited the belief that the constituent elements (Dharma/Dhamma) are absolute (Paramārtha/ Paramattha), and as having at least partial permanency.

These later teachers appear to have overlooked the fact that when the Buddha said that " Sabbe dhammā anatta" , this included everything , even Asaṅkhata (unconditioned) things. Thus, it is very clear that the Buddha spoke about the explaining voidness of even elements. By trying to explain impermanency or 'change' (Aniccatā) according to reason and logic the later teachers brought in concepts that not in agreement with the teachings of early Buddhism. Ācārya

Nāgārjuna who was extremely versed with early Buddhist teachings had to forcefully remind these late schools of Buddhist thought that they are misrepresenting the Buddha's teaching.

In order to do this he emphasized that the individual is void of a soul (Pudgala-nairātmya). But, he had another problem to overcome. This is to emphasize that not the individual but even the factors that constitute the individual and the world itself, that is all elements (Dharmas) are void of anything permanent. For this he emphasized Dharma-nairātmya, which was not given special emphasis in early Buddhism, for there was no belief at that time regarding the permanency of elements.

In order to cover both these aspects , that is the voidness concerining the individual and the elements , Ācārya Nāgārjuna very correctly opted to use the term Śūnya unlike Anatta, which mainly conveyed the idea of absence of an individual soul, the term Śūnya denoted a wider meaning brining out the absence of any entity in anything whether in the individual or in the constituent the elements.

7.1.3. Middle path

Ācāya Nāgārjuna used the Buddha's central teaching about the dependent origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda) nature of everything to establish the voidness of all phenomena. In early Buddhism Paṭiccasamuppāda doctrine is used more to emphasize the interdependence of all phenomena. Ācārya Nāgārjuna, very correctly, saw that the Buddha 's real purpose of explaining everything as being subject to Paṭiccasamuppāda is to show the voidness of everything of

any permanent substance . Therefore, he emphasized the "relativity" aspect of it. If everything exist in relation to other things , then there is no independent existence of anything; extreme or non-extreme itself is relative. Thus, the two approaches show only difference of emphasis, though in meaning and spirit they are same. Ācārya Nāgārjuna very rightly applies Śūnya to whatever that is compounded , hence his conclusion regarding Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa. He says;(1) ***" Na saṃsārasya nirvāṇāt kiñcdasti viśeṣaṇaṃ na nirvāṇasya saṃsārāt kiñcidasti veśeṣanaṃ."***

This has been generally translated to mean that there is no distinction between Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa, and both Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa are similar. It is very doubtful whether Ācārya Nāgārjuna intends making such a statement. If so , he is suggesting that there is no need for people to strive to attain emancipation . If this is taken in the above sense then the whole of Buddhist practice becomes no value. It is accepted that Saṃsāra is Dukkha, and to escape this Dukkha realization of Nirvāṇa is necessary. Then, it is obvious that these two cannot be identical.

7.1.4. Kiñcid

Ācārya Nāgārjuna is saying something more profound. It was pointed before that even according to early Buddhism that everything, the whole world should be viewed as Suñña (Suññatao lokaṃ avekkhassu). Similarly, Nibbāna is also defined in early Buddhism as Suñña, void of anything substantial; the realization of voidness of everything is the realization of Nibbāna. In this respect , that is the

absence of substance or an entity Saṃsāra and nirvana are same; they are without **"something"** (Kiñcid) that make them distinct from each other.The used of the word 'Kiñcid" is very significant. What Ācārya Nāgārjuna says is that there is no "something" that makes them different from each other. Immediately following stanza further establishes this'(2)

" *Nirvāṇasya ca yā kothi- kotih saṃsaraṇasya ca*

na tayor antaraṃ kiñcit-susūkṣmaṃpi vidyate"

(whatever, is the end of nirvana and the end of the circling of life process, between them there is not even a very subtle thing that is to be seen). It is important to observe that Ācārya Nāgārjuna is saying that there is no even a "**subtle something**" (Kiñcid susūkṣmaṃpi) between Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa (Tayor antaraṃ). In the absence of that is in being void of such "something" both are comparable. But, this does not mean that samsara and Nirvāṇa are identical in all respect. What is Ācārya Nāgārjuna trying to emphasize is that Nirvāṇa is also Śūnya , a teaching very explicitly expressed in early Buddhism . But, this teaching of Ācārya Nāgārjuna seem to have been misunderstand during his own time. There is evidence in the *Mū lamadhyamakakārikā* itself that suggest such misunderstandings. Consider, for example why Ācārya Nāgārjuna had to say: ***" emptiness , however, is not annihilationism; and saṃsāric existence is not eternal"*** **(Śūnyatā ca na cochedaḥ samsāraśca na śāsvatam)** (3)Further consider the saying : ***" For him who is engrossed in existence , eternalism or annihilationism will***

necessarily follow, for he would assume that it is either permanent or impermanent" **(4)**

It is because Śūnyatā doctrine was wrongly gasped that Ācārya Nāgārjuna was forced to adopt a simile found in the "Alagaddūpamasutta" of *Majjhimanikāya* **(5).**

He warns people not to wrongly grasp this teaching. Ācārya Nāgārjuna in a firm admonition says: ***" A wrongly perceived emptiness ruins a person of little intelligence. It is like a snake that is wrongly grasped or knowledge that is wrongly cultivated"(6)***

7.1.4. Action and agent

All these clearly suggest that Śūnyatā was misunderstood from very early times. On the one hand , it was thought to be the total emptiness, absence of anything , an utter form of nihilism. It was taken to such extremes that Ācārya Nāgārjuna's Śūnyatā doctrine was interpreted as a denial of all fundamental teachings of the Buddha. Thus, for example , Ācārya Nāgārjuna analysis of action and agent (chapter 08. Karma-kāraka-parīkṣā) has been interpreted as a total denial of karma by him. A similar interpretation is given to the Karmaphala parīkṣā (chapt.17). In the "Tathāgatha-parīkṣā" (chapt.22) that is examination of Tathāgata presents statements as follows:

" The Tathāgata is neither the aggregates nor different from them. The aggregates are not in him, nor he in the aggregates. He is not possessed of the aggregates. In such a contexts who is a Tathāgata"(7).

"He who is dependent upon other nature would appropriately to without self.
Yet how can he who is without self be a tathāgata?".(8)

Such statements have been taken to mean that the Tathāgata does not exist. But Ācārya Nāgārjuna's objective was quite different, and philosophically more deep. He only did deny the attribution of permanency, a self-nature to these. But, many failed to grasp this deep philosophical significance, and labeled Śūnyatā doctrine as a form nihilism which posited a total void, absence of anything'. Thus, Śūnyatā was taken in its most primary sense , and Madhyamaka doctrine of Śūnyatā was misinterpreted.

7.1.5. Is Śunyata absolute truth?

On the other hand this Śūnyatā was raised to height of the Absolute Truth, the Ideal, giving it the status of something that eternally exist. Perhaps, this may have been due to the influences of the Brahman concept in Vedānta Philosophy. Thus same scholars define Śūnyatā presented by Ācārya Nāgārjuna as ' the unconditioned which is the ultimate truth of the conditioned', such definitions raise Śūnyatā into a metaphysical concept. There is no metaphysics in this way Ācārya Nāgārjuna describes Śūnyatā. For him as it was for the Buddha himself, Śūnyatā meant the total absence of any entity, any substance, whatever name we use to identify it. Just as the Buddha admonished his followers not to raise "Anatta' doctrine to the status of a view and start blindly clinging to it, Ācāraya Nāgārjuna, is a very tersely worded admonition, tells the followers the same thing. he says; **"The victorious one (Jinas) have declared that emptiness means the giving up of all views. Those who are possessed of the view of emptiness are said to be incorrigible"(9).**

Thus, just as the Buddha did not intend to present Anatta (Anātma) as a view or a theory opposed to "Atta" (Ātma) view , Ācāraya Nāgārjuna , too, is emphatically saying that Śūnyatā should not be considered as a view (Dṛṣṭi). Dogmatic clingning to views is denounced by both the Buddha and Ācārya Nāgarjuna . Both advocate the giving up or relinquishing of all views (Sarvadrṣṭi prahāṇa). In fact Ācārya Nāgarjuna explicitly says that this is the Buddha 's teaching. He in his concluding verse of salutation to the Buddha says; **" I reverently bow down to Gotama who, full of compassion, has taught the true doctrine in order to relinquish all views"(10).** Thus, both Anatta (=Śūnyatā) of early Buddhism and Śūnyatā of Madhyamaka are not ideals, nor are they theories or views. If so what are they?. Both are philosophical and meditational means of realizing emancipations or Nibbāna (Nirvāṇa). It was earlier pointed out that we all are in bondage to Samsāric existence because of our ignorance . This ignorance is our inability, so see things, all phenomena as they have come to be (Yathābhūta). Since, our vision is blurred by ignorance, we construct everything through our ignorance , our idea about the world, in brief our whole world-view is a lopsided one. Suñña or Śūnya is a means to drive away ignorance , to obtain a true vision of all phenomena, to turn right side up of things which we view upside down. The Buddha's teaching is for this. In many a Sutta, listners after hearing the Dhamma and obtaining "eye of Dhamma" (Dhamma-cakkhu) declares in the following manner how their vision has got straightened and clear.

" Excellent ,sir, excellent. It is as if someone were to set up what has been turned upside down uncovered what has been

covered, or pointed out the way to one who has lost his way, or to hold an oil-lamp in the darkness, so that those with eyes may see visual objects…. Just so, the Fortunate one has expounded the Dhamma in numerous ways…"(11).

7.2. Paṭiccasamuppāda and Suññata

The above sort of expressions of confidence and appreciations are very common in the *Nikāyas*. What the clearly show is that Dhamma is what helps one to uncover what has been hidden by ignorance. What is this Dhamma?. This is the explanation of the true nature of things. As explained in the "Mahāhattipadopama Sutta" of the *Majjhimanikāya*, this Dhamma is Paṭiccasamuppāda (dependent origination) In this Sutta the Buddha very explicitly says; ***" He who sees Paṭiccasamuppāda sees the Dhamma; he who sees the Dhamma sees Paṭiccasamuppāda (Yo Paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati; yo dhammaṃ passati so paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati)".*** This Paṭiccasamuppāda , as it has already been shown clearly, is nothing other that the relativity, interdependence, absence of permanency, absence of any independence existence in phenomena. As shown before, the Buddha very clearly brings out this in the "Kaccayānagottasutta" of the *Majjhimanikāya.* This sutta brings out the fact that paticcasamuppda shows that all phenomena is void of a soul or any such entity that could be considered as the soul. Therefore, Paṭiccasamuppāda according to the Buddha is another way of expressing the emptiness of all phenomena. This teaching of the Buddha is very emphatically highlighted by Ācarya Nāgārjuna . He equates Paṭiccasamuppāda with Śūnya . He says: ***"Whatever that is dependent arising we say that is emptiness" (12).*** To Ācarya

Nāgārjuna Pratītyasamutpāda and Śūnyatā are co-terminus; They cover the same meaning and refer to the same thing. Thus identification of Partītyasamutpāda with Śūnyatā very well establish the fact that unlike many other teachers , who attempted to interpret Buddhism by bringing in metaphysical concepts such as Svabhāva (self-nature) own nature, Ācarya Nāgārjuna had very correctly grasped the essence of the Buddha 's teaching , that everything is Suñña (Śūnyatā).

7.2.1. Not a view

The Buddha was very careful to caution his followers that none of his teachings should be considered as views (Diṭṭhi/Dṛṣṭi) and tenaciously cling to them. He, on the other hand advocated the giving up of all views. Even Dhamma should not be taken as the gospel truth, a dogmatic views to which followers should pay homage and reverence. In the "Alagaddupamasutta" of the *Majjhimanikāya.* The Buddha compares the Dhamma to a raft. A raft has to be used to cross the water. The Buddha says that once it has been used it should not be grasped and carried on the head or the shoulders, for this means the attribution of same entity, some substance to Dhamma and raising it to an idealist state. It is not to be clutched, it is for crossing (Nittaranatthāya), like a raft (Kullūpamaṃ).

Besides, the Buddha rejecting that this Paṭiccasamuppāda is a theory, says that even the Dhamma has to be given up. This is exactly what Ācarya Nāgārjuana says about Śūnyatā. Though there has been as attempt to raise Śūnyatā into Absolute Reality, which will ever

remains as a supra-mundane reality, Ācārya Nāgārjuna, rejects such attempts. Just as the Buddha did advice his followers to discard the soul-view and not to substitute it with the no-soul (Anatta) view , Ācārya Nāgārjuna also strongly warns against those who attempt to discard all other views and adopt Śūnyatā as the absolute supra-mundane reality.

Just as the Buddha used "Anatta" as a means of freeing the mind of the deep-rooted belief in a self, a metaphysical self as well as psychological attachment to a permanent entity, Ācārya Nāgārjuna uses Śūnyatā as a means of dispelling all false views and seeing the true nature of everything. This does not make Śūnyatā a super-view that stands above all other views. It is like a fire band , a torch that lightens up a dark place and make visible the objects in the place, the objects that one has been searching for. Once the objects are truly seen and found , the use of the fire brand or the torch is over. So is Śūnyatā. It enlightens one, it helps to straighten the vision, to dispel ignorance , to destroy all subjective tendencies that distort proper understanding.

Ācārya Nāgārjuna clearly says that the Buddha himself has declared that emptiness or Śūnyatā is giving up (Nishsaraṇaṃ) of all views. He further says that to whom Śūnyatā is a view, they are incorrigible.(13). It has been shown earlier that Anatta , Śūnyatā and Pratītya-samutpāda means the same. In meaning and sense they are one; the difference is only in terminology. To see anything as Anatta, means to see that as Śūnya and Paṭiccasamuppanna. They are all paṭicca-samupannaṃ. This is why, following the Buddha (Suññato lokaṃ avekhassu: see the world as empty), Ācārya Nāgārjuna advises

his followers to see everything as Śūnya . He says, it is those who see dependent origination sees also suffering , its arising, its ceasing and the path leading to its cessation.(14).

This is the true purpose of Śūnya, or as a matter of fact of Śūnya, Anatta, and Paṭiccasamuppāda. They are referred to as Dhamma (Dharma), because it is Dhamma that shows the way to emancipation, the way to dispel ignorance and attain enlightenment. It is like the finger that points to the moon , the thing that is to be perceived. The moon (reality) and the finger the means of seen the reality should not be confessed. Similarly, Śūnyatā like Anatta, and Paṭiccasamuppāda is only a means to see things in their true nature . This means that is Śūnya, should not be considered as the end. In the case of Śūnya this seems to have happened . Some consider Śūnya to be the ultimate reality that finally exist when every other theory has been demolished. This is not so. It is to dispel this wrong understanding that Ācārya Nāgārjuna says that ūnya itself is Śūnya , that is Śunya itself is without any substance. Like everything else

Śūnyatā itself is Śunya. So there is nothing to grasp in Śūnyatā. It iether posses, a self, a Svabhāva (self-nature) or anything related to self or self-nature. Therefore, Śūnyatā should not be raised to an idealistic state. If that happens, the whole purpose for which Śūnyatā is meant would get lost. Śūnyatā should be used as a means to demolish all views, connected with a self. By giving up all other views and holding on to Śūnyatā . Correct view or the perfect view is not another view to which we should tie ourselves. Śūnyatā is in other words, prajna regarding the true nature of things, how thing have come

to be . This is not a view but a correct understanding of the true nature of all things. When one sees the true state of things being void Dukkha or suffering , we have been understand due to ignorance regarding the true nature of will get dispelled.

7.2.3. Personal experience

It is seen that Ācārya Nāgārjuna in his "*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*" is adopting a system of logic to prove that everything is Śunya. For this purpose he analyses the views put forward by all other schools regarding the nature of reality and highlights their internal contradictions. By demonstrating these internal contradictions, he reduces those views to mere absurdities and , for this reason , his method of argument is called **Reductio ad absurdum.** Predominantly through logic and reasoning that Ācārya Nāgārjuna is trying to bring into forefront the original teaching of the Buddha .This, perhaps , may be due to the circumstances in which he was writing and teaching. By that time there were schools like the Sarvāstivāda and Sautraātika that were profusely engaged in using logic and reasoning to prove their view points. The arguments of the master of these schools of Buddhist thought had to be based on logic and reasoning. The result was the "*Mūlamadhyamikakārika*". On the whole the Buddha's approaches was different. While the Buddha used logic and reasoning to establish the fundamentals of his teachings, he did not stop at that. He urged his followers to obtain personal experience of these fundamentals. For example, he used logic and reason to convince his listners that there is no self or anything

pertaining to a self underlying phenomena. While logic and reasoning was made use to instill this conviction, the Buddha urged his followers to engage in meditation to gain personal experience of that conviction.

Samādhis such as Animitta, Appanihita, are for this purpose. The "Cūla-suññata sutta" and "Mahā-sunanata-sutta" (both of which have already been discussed in details) clearly speak of meditational practices that lead to the personal experiencing of this conviction which one obtains through logic and reasoning. This does not mean that Ācārya Nāgārjuna did not advocate the practices of meditation. But it is clear that greater emphasis in the "*Madhyamakakārikā*" is on an intellectual understanding of Śunya as the true nature things. The more one uses words the more one provides opportunities to misinterpret. This seems to lave happened in the case of Śūnyatā as presented by Ācārya Nāgārjuna. His predominant use of logic had led his readers to grasp Śūnyatā intellectually and not experientially. Intellectual grasping is very often coloured by one's prejudices, one's preconceived notions, likes and dislikes. Intellectual grasping tends to be rather subjective.

The process indicated in the Suttas the practise of different meditations recommended for this purpose, enables one to personally experience the voidness, emptiness of all things. It makes one give up all views; prevents one from mistaking Śūnyatā to be a view. It turns into one's own understanding about the true nature of oneself and his world of existence.Therefore, the intellectual understanding one obtains through the presentation of Śūnyatā doctrine in the

"*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*" should be further verified, clarified through experiences.

This is the message Ācārya Nāgārjuna offers through his writings. The listners are thoroughly advised not to be content by taking Śūnyatā to be a mere theory , a view. It should be utilized as a means to purge out all views from the mind. It is the only way to dispel confusion and ignorance that hinders proper understanding of the true nature of phenomenas. When one internalizes this experience of Śūnyatā then he will realize 'that there is nothing that is not dependently arisen', and therefore, a thing that is non-empty is not indeed evident (15).

End -notes

(1).*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā,* chapter 25.stanza 19

(2). *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā,* chapter 25.stanza 20.

(3). *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā,* chapter17: stanza20

(4). *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* chapter 21: stanza14

"Bhāvamabhyupapannasya -śāsvatocchedadarśanam
prasajyate sa bhāvohi - nityo'nitya' thavā bhavet".

(5). *Majjhimanikāya*, "Alagaddūpamasutta".

(6). *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā,* chapter 24: stanza 11

"Vinaśyati durdṛṣṭā -Śūnyatā mandamedhasam
sarpo yathā durgṛhīto vidyā vā duṣprasādhitā"

(7). *Mūlamadhyamakākrikā,* chapter 22 stanza 01

" Skandhā na nānya: skandhebhyo nasmin skandhā na teṣus:
tathāgata: skandhavān na katamo'tra tathāgata:"

(8). *Mūlamadhyamakārikā* chapter 22 stanza 03

"Pratītya parabhāvaṃ ya:- so'nātmetyupapadyate

yaścānātmā sa ca kathaṃ bhaviṣyati tathāgata:

(9). *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* chapter 13, stanza 08.

" Śūnyatā sarva-dṛṣṭināṃ- proktā nihsaraṇaṃ jinaih
yeṣāṃ tu śūnyatā-dṛṣṭis -tanasādhyān bahāṣire"

(10). *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā,* chapter 27; stanza 30

" Sarva-dṛṣṭi-prahāṇāya ya: saddharmamadeśayat
anukampāmupādāya -taṃ namṣyāmi gautamam"

(11). *Dīghanikāya*, "Ambhaṭṭasutta"

"Abhikkantaṃ bho Gotama, abhikkantaṃ bho Gotama, seyata pi bho Gotama nikkujjitaṃ vā ukkujjeya, paṭicchannaṃ vā vivareyya, mūlhassa vā maggaṃ ācikkheyya, andhakāre vā telapajjotaṃ dhāreyya cakkhumante rūpaṃ dakkhintī ti . Evameva bho Gotamena, anekapariyāyena dhammo pakāsito".

(12). *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā,*, chapter 24.stanza18

"Ya: pratītyasamupāda: -śūnytāṃ tāṃ pracākṣmahe"

.(13). *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā,* chapter13: stanza 08.

"Śūnyatā sarva-dṛṣṭināṃ proktā nihsaraṇaṃ jinaih
yesaṃtu Śūnyatā dṛṣṭis tanasādhyān bahāṣire".

(14). *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā,* "chapter 24. stanza40.

" Ya: pratītya samutpādaṃ paśyatīdaṃ sa paśyati
dukkhaṃ samudayaṃ caiva -nirodhaṃ mārgameva ca "

(15). *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā,* chapter 24; stanza19.

"Apratītya samutpanno dharma: kaścinna vidyate yasmāt
tasmādaśūnyo hi –dharma: kaścinna vidyate"

Conclusion

This study on Suññata (Skt.Śūnyatā) is mainly based on the Pāli texts. However, it is known that Śūnyatā came into prominence only with the rise of Madhyamaka philosophy of Ācārya Nāgārjuna. Therefore, no study of Suññata is complete, without any reference to Śūnyatā as presented in Madhyamaka philosophy.

This study was done also with the objective of clarifying certain widely presented views regarding Śūnyatā. One of them is that this doctrine was not known to early Buddhism, or in other words, not a doctrine taught by the Buddha . This view gained so much of popularity, that scholars of the caliber of Stcherbatsky, followed by T.R.V. Murti boldly claimed this to be an innovation of Ācārya Nāgārjuna . Murti even went into the extent of comparing Ācārya Nāgārjuna's teaching on Śūnyatā as a 'Copernican revolution' in Buddhist thought. Therefore, besides explaining Suñña as found in the Suttas, an attempt has been made in this thesis also to show that this doctrine was well known to early Buddhism .

Thus, two whole chapter of this has been denoted to examine use of Suñña and other related terms in the suttas and in Post - canonical Pāli literature. By enumerating and explaining such usages it has been possible to establish that this Suñña idea is not unknown to either the Buddha or to the disciples. However, the study shows that the terms Suñña/Suññata are not of common occurrence as the term Anatta. It also came to light that that even the disciples, though they knew what Suñña /Suññata meant were far more familiar with the Anatta doctrine.

An attempt was made to examine how Śūnya /Śūnyatā came into prominence overshadowing Anatta doctrine. In the present researchers view it is the early Madhyamaka texts like "Aṣṭasāhaśrikāprajñāpāramitā" etc, that contributed to the early popularity of these terms as a religious technical term.

These early Mahāyāna texts were in response to the non-Mahāyāna Buddhist schools that upheld the existence of some sort of metaphysical entity that lay as the essence in everything. Of these schools the most prominent was the Sarvāstivāda school , and this belonged to the Theravāda (=Hinayāna tradition). This school in its attempt to explain reality, put forward a novel view which said that there is a self-nature (Sva-bhāva) in everything, and that this Svabhāva, exits in all three periods of time namely, past present and future. The earliest criticism against this and other substantialist and essentialist views was by Mahāyānists. In counter-arguing this view these early Mahāyāna texts highlighted the emptiness , voidness (Śūnyatā) of everything. It is , however, Nāgārjuna that made this his central thesis in presenting the Madhyamaka philosophy of his.

In this book an attempt has been made to show that Anatta and Śūnya/Śūnyatā are not two different concepts. The present researcher is in agreement with the view that these two concepts cover the same range in their philosophical application; and that the preference for this term Śūnya /Śūnyatā over Anatta denotes only a shift of emphasis. The present researcher attempted to establish this point, citing textual and circumstantial evidence.

In doing this it has been attempted to demonstrate that the Buddha ,too, used the term Suñña, and that he did so, not to bring out a new perspective but to further emphasize the absence of a self or anything connected with the self as the noumenon behind the phenomenon. In support of this textual evidence has been cited. It has also been shown that "Anatta" as used in early Suttas, did not merely mean the absence of an individual soul, but meant also the absence of any entity in both compounded (Saṃkhata/Saṃskṛta) elements as well as in uncompounded (Asaṃkhata, Asaṃskrta) elements, that is Nibbāna. Thus , it has been clearly shown that Anatta means "emptiness" of everything, including Nibbāna (Nirnvāṇa).

Modern scholarship has attempted to show that Ācārya Nāgārjuna gave a new interpretation to the Pratītyasamutpāda doctrine, and it is Ācārya Nāgārjuna that presented it as the central philosophy of Buddhism. It is true , according to the teachings of the present researcher, that Ācārya Nāgārjuna lays mere stress on the relativity aspect of Pratītyasamutpāda , while the early sutta focuses more on its dependent origination aspect. Once again these are only different angles or perspectives from which the same doctrine is viewed. Paṭicca-samuppāda /Pratītya-samutpāda emphasis, both interdependence and relativity. In the final analysis these two aspects cannot be separated.

In early Suttas Paṭicca-smuppāda was presented to explain causality , and in doing so the Buddha had to show that the then prevalent theories namely, self-creation, (Sayaṃ kataṃ) external creation (Paraṃ kataṃ) both self-creation and external creation , and

also no causation) or accidental causation, = Ahetu-appaccaya, Adhicca-samuppanna or yadrcchavāda) are wrong. His explanation of Paticca-samuppāda was focused on the rejection of these other causal theories.

Madhyamaka, however, emphasis the reality aspect of Pratītyasamutpāda and ues it as a counter argument to nullify the Svabhāva theory. Because of this Pratītyasamutpāda was considered more as an explanation of the voidness of everything. The two explanations namely , that of the Theravāda Buddhist school and the Mahāyāna philosophy of the Pratītya-samutpāda formula is not different in spirit though the emphasis is different. And , of course , it has to be admitted that emphasis could vary according to the circumstance in which and the objective for which the formula is used.

Though some scholars attempt to show that it is Ācārya Nāgārjuna that raised Pratītyasamutpāda to the status of the central philosophy of Buddhism , The present researcher has attempted to show that early Buddhism to considered it to be so. For example, the content of enlightenment is often described as the knowledge regarding Pratītyasamutpāda. All other doctrines are based on and explained according to Pratītyasamutpāda.. Besides, the "Kaccānagotta Sutta" very clearly calls it the preaching by the middle (Majjhena dhamma) which means it is the most-important central teaching. It should also be remembered that in the "Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta" , Paṭiccasamuppāda is equated with the Dhamma, which mean it is the essence, the crux of the Buddha 's teaching. However, it has to be noted , that it is Ācārya Nāgārjuna

who made it prominent as the central philosophy of Buddhism without limiting it the explanation of Dukkha as it was in early Buddhism.

Besides, one should acknowledge also the fact that in early Buddhist Suttas Paṭipadā is used in the sense of the way, the path or the practice and 'Majjhimā paṭipadā' is identical with the Noble Eightfold Path. But it is Ācārya Nāgarjuna who brought into light that that it is Pratītyasamutpāda, which is the most fundamental of the Buddha 's teaching, that even it provides the philosophical basis for the practice. The credit for highlighting the true spirit of the Buddha's teaching is solely due to Ācārya Nāgārjuna.

A chapter was denoted to the study of various meditatinal practices recommended in early Buddhism, that lead to the realization of Suñña. Special focus was laid on two suttas namely Cūla-Suññata and Mahā-suññata both of the *Majjhimanikāya*. These while showing that the Buddha emphasized internalization of the understanding of the voidness of everything describes also how this could be done . This chapter will be of interest to those who wish to understand how meditative practice could be utilized to personally experience the voidness of all phenomena.

A chapter was devoted to show that it is not only the canonical Suttas that speaks of Suñña/Suññata, but there is ample reference to it is post-canonical texts such as the *Visuddhimagga*. This chapter also brings to light that the Pāli tradition was not unaware about the developments of the ūnya concept that was taking place in other non-Theravāda traditions.

The present researcher's study made it clear that the concept of Nibbāna/Nirvāṇa both in early Buddhism and Madhyamaka are similar; both advocate that Nibbāna/ Nirvāṇa can be realized by correcting the distorted vision , driving out all "views" (dṛṣṭi) that distort the proper understanding of reality . Both teachings hold that the final knowledge refers to the understanding of the true nature of things. To proper understanding in early Buddhism , is to see things as Anicca (impermanent) Dukkha (non-satisfactory/suffering), and Anatta (no-soul, no substance or essence). According to Madhyamaka this knowledge consist of seeing everything as empty, void (Śūnya) of a Sva-bhāva (self-nature). From this it is clear that though there is a difference in terminology, in spirit both early Buddhism and Madhyamaka, advocate the same things. This is further established by the fact that the Buddha also also an occasions advises that, one in order to escape this cycle of birth and death should see everything as empty (Suññato lokaṃ avekkhassu).

The major difference the present researcher sees between early Buddhism and Madhyamaka in their approach to Śūnya is that the former lay more emphasis on personal experience in realizing the emptiness (Suññata) of all phenomena, while the later emphasises on logic and reasoning leading to an intellectual comprehension of it. However, the does not mean that Madhyamaka is not stressing the importance of internalizing this knowledge. The present researcher is of the view that Ācārya Nāgarjuna 's use of logic and reason is due to circumstances of the time, and the purpose for which his work *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* was composed . It was composed not as a

guide to practice but as a critical response for realists and substantialists. Hence, the preponderance of logic and reason .

Through this the present researcher found more tangible evidence to agree with the view that Ācāraya Nāgārjuna was not trying to present any new teaching but was making a concerted effort to remind the Buddhist scholarship of the time that it is deviating from the teaching of the Buddha . The two stanzas of salutation for the Buddha, at the beginning and the end of his book, *(Mūlamadhyamakakārikā)* very clearly shows that Ācārya Nāgārjuna was a great follower and admire of the Buddha , and that he was attempting to highlight the true teachings (Saddharma) of the Buddha .

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THE CONCEPT OF EMPTINESS IN PĀLI LITERATURE



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With bad advisors forever left behind,
From paths of evil he departs for eternity,
Soon to see the Buddha of Limitless Light
And perfect Samantabhadra's Supreme Vows.

The supreme and endless blessings
of Samantabhadra's deeds,
I now universally transfer.
May every living being, drowning and adrift,
Soon return to the Pure Land of
Limitless Light!

~The Vows of Samantabhadra~

I vow that when my life approaches its end,
All obstructions will be swept away;
I will see Amitabha Buddha,
And be born in His Western Pure Land of
Ultimate Bliss and Peace.

When reborn in the Western Pure Land,
I will perfect and completely fulfill
Without exception these Great Vows,
To delight and benefit all beings.

~The Vows of Samantabhadra
Avatamsaka Sutra~